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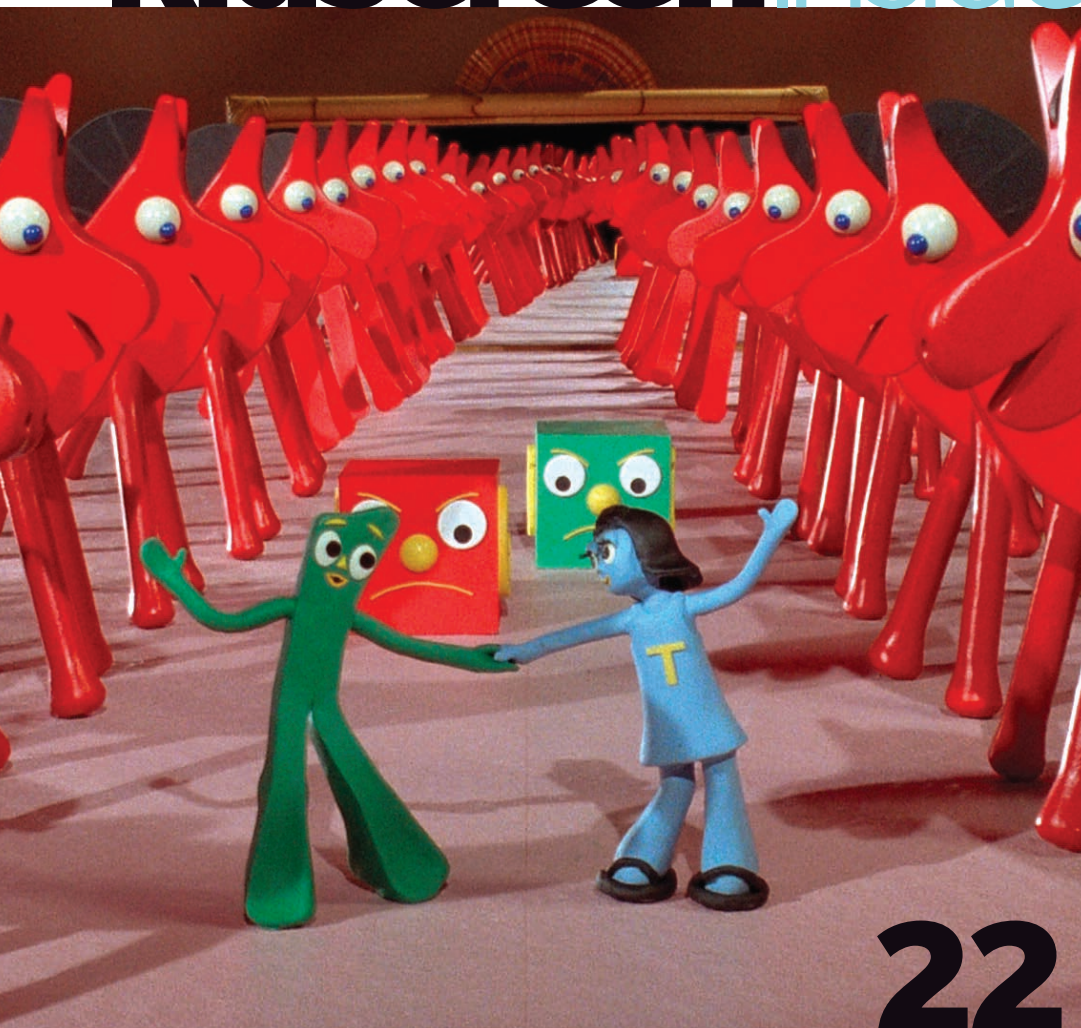
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Cover Our cover features an ad for Zodiak Kids' new 52 x 11-minute preschool comedy-adventure show *Floogals*, while our inside editorial cover sports an image of the beret-clad mascot from Brain Power Studio/Big Tent Entertainment-owned YouTube channel Something Fuzzy.

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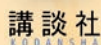
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The word of the day is...

Upheaval. It's the word that kept ringing through my brain as we were producing this issue. Clearly, the kids industry, not to mention the overall business of content production and broadcasting, has been in a state of flux for at least five years. But the terrain has not been this tumultuous for awhile.



Our April issue starts off by taking note of the recent spate of high-profile layoffs at Nickelodeon US (see "The list," p.17). Part of a planned restructure that's aiming to clip US\$250 million off parentco Viacom's balance sheet, the exec departures raised a few

eyebrows and questions about the future path of Nick's preschool and kids animation development. As the net gets set to launch its first OTT SVOD service, preschool-targeted Noggin in the US, I guess the short answer is, we'll have to wait and see.

Also in our Moves section, we take a look at the utter transfiguration of Canada's TV landscape (see p.20). The nation's regulatory body has, in effect, set in motion the dismantling of the last 50 years of television legislation. Gone are daytime CanCon requirements for specialty channels, along with bloated cable bundles and the Terms of Trade agreement that Canada's producers fought so hard to enact in 2011. For *Kidscreen* readers, many of whom count on Canada as a solid co-production partner, the real question is how these changes will affect the country's vibrant kids content production community. For instance, does it mean there will be fewer commissions for preschool programming now that its core daypart no longer demands qualified Canadian content and broadcasters can arguably opt for less-expensive licensed shows? Where does that leave co-production opportunities? It's too early to answer those questions, however, I do know I'm not worried about the big integrated media companies like Rogers and Bell. Even if most Canadians unbundle and opt for skinny basic cable packages, when you own (and set the download rates for) the data pipes enabling the use of OTT services like Netflix, you're going to make money.

Then, Online Writer Daniela Fisher takes a closer look at the new *YouTube Kids* app—a game-changer, if there ever was one. (See "A new kind of network," p.53.) The first YouTube app designed specifically for kids made waves at Kidscreen Summit in February, where it was unveiled by global head of family and learning Malik Ducard during his keynote address. Its potential is significant and its impact is likely to be fully felt when it rolls out beyond US borders sometime this year, hopefully. Until then, fasten your seatbelts.

Finally, a bit of a head-turner. Admittedly, it's not covered in this issue, but I couldn't help but notice this recent headline from The New York Times: "Netflix, Amazon and Hulu No Longer Find Themselves Upstarts in Online Streaming." The story takes note of a whole new crop of competitors chomping at the bit to take a bite out of the leaders' market share. These newer players like HBO Now and Vessel have no announced plans to enter the kids space, but their presence is driving the, er, establishment to up its game in terms of offering more originals and exclusives... it's like cable TV all over again, or is it? At any rate, I'm stocking up on neck braces—I feel a case of whiplash coming on.

Cheers,
Lana

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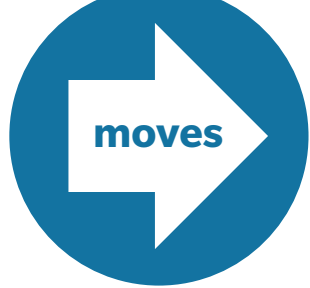


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The List

Five things on our radar this month

1 Viacom restructure shakes up Nickelodeon

As part of Viacom's company-wide corporate overhaul, expected to help save US\$250 million annually, Nickelodeon's preschool and animation divisions were hit with significant job cuts in March. Gone are EVP of preschool programming Teri Weiss and Kay Wilson Stallings, SVP of production and development for Nickelodeon Preschool, Nick Jr. and NickMom. On the animation side, Rich Magallenes (SVP of current series), Jenna Boyd (SVP of animation development) and Jill Sanford (VP of animation development) also parted ways with Nick. Considering the broadcaster's emphasis on producing more new original content at its 2015/16 upfront, and its recent investment in preschool, the layoffs raise more questions than they provide answers in terms of future direction. For example, Nickelodeon declined to comment on who will lead its preschool programming division in the wake of the layoffs. But it's clear Viacom CEO Philippe Dauman is right in continuing the company's efforts to adapt to changing audience behavior as kids and adults increasingly turn to mobile devices to consume content.



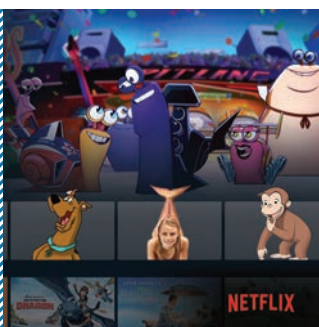
2 Scholastic restructures

A blow to the US animation industry, Scholastic Media's toon studio Soup2Nuts is closing its doors as part of a restructuring of Scholastic Media. The plan is to better align operations with its core businesses—publishing and educational products. But with news of the in-house studio's closure breaking around the same time as longtime Scholastic Media president Deborah Forte's departure, all signs point to the company taking a notable step back from TV production.



3 Conscious uncoupling

In a landmark ruling, Canada's broadcast regulator the CRTC has ordered the unbundling of the country's cable biz. By the end of 2016, all cablers will have to offer "skinny basic" packages for CDN\$25/month—max. Consumers can then add channels à la carte to avoid paying for stuff they don't watch. While great news for most Canucks, it hasn't been welcomed by specialty operators, many of which may pay the price for this new freedom in cuts to programming.



4 Netflix loses some lustre

It was bound to happen sooner or later. Netflix's stock price recently took a 15% tumble on the news that competitors are now entering the SVOD ring almost daily. But the California-based company isn't throwing in the towel just yet. With more than 57 million subscribers in 50 countries already, Netflix intends to add more than 200 countries in the next two years. Your move, HBO Now.



5 Power play

It came as a surprise when Nintendo, after years of refusals, announced a partnership with Japanese mobile-game company DeNA to bring its classic characters to smartphones and tablets. While the industry and gamers alike debate whether or not this is welcome or worrisome, one thing is certain—Nintendo has its work cut out to please both retro game fans and new mobile audiences.

➔ To keep up with the news as it happens, check out Kidscreen.com daily.



Following a passion for broad-reaching entertainment, avid storyteller **Curtis Lelash** built a career that's taken him from the lows of *When Animals Attack!* to the highs of Cartoon Network executive life

Chasing what you love

The gig VP of comedy animation at Cartoon Network, overseeing the development and ongoing production of the network's animated comedy series and supervising the studio's shorts development program.

Humble beginnings Growing up in the small town of Armonk, New York—a community with no theater or chain restaurants—Curtis Lelash often turned to TV as a refuge. “I watched a lot of TV as a kid. I would get up at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday and watch straight on until noon, if I was allowed to. I was hugely into shows like *Looney Toons*, *Tom and Jerry*, *G.I. Joe* and *Voltron*,” says Lelash.

The young toon fanatic's love of storytelling led him to dabble with acting during high school before taking on theater studies at Colgate University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English-Dramatic Literature from NYU. Faced with the uncertainty of finding a real job, Lelash got a reality check on how to “make it” during an NYU career fair.

“They had speakers who were in TV and publishing, and everybody told a story about how they luckily fell into something,” he recalls. “Looking back, this is kind of how it works. Unless you're on a very specific path, if you don't know exactly what your niche is, you just have to chase the things that you love the most. This is what I tell people today.”

Moving to animation Before joining Cartoon Network's original series department as manager of comedy animation in 2005, Lelash worked on a range of film and TV jobs in L.A. “My worst job was doing production work in an office for a *When Animals Attack!* clip show. The first day was so terrible, I quit on the second day. I felt so guilty, but I just knew it was wrong. Since then I've always tried to be close to the things that excite me,” he says.

Things turned a corner once he was hired by art gallery and TV and film development company Storyopolis. “On one of my first days, they were working on a short for Nickelodeon with Berkeley Breathed who created the comic strip *Bloom County*, which I worshipped as a kid. I did a recording session with him my first week, and I was like, ‘Oh man, I must be doing something right.’”

But Lelash says his career-making moment came during his last production job on the set of a Steven Soderbergh movie. “I was driving Steven around the Universal lot to go to a costume session and he said, ‘I hear you're leaving us for a development job.’ The fact that, one, he knew who I was, and, two, that he cared I was leaving, was just an amazing moment for me,” says Lelash.

Fulfilled dreams In his current role overseeing the newer comedy series like *Steven Universe* and *Uncle Grandpa*, as well as newly announced programs including an *Adventure Time* miniseries and *Regular Show* movie, Lelash says he is always blown away by his talented peers. “We have a great core of animators and executives who still tap into what it feels like to be a 10-year-old. As you get older, life tries to strip that away from you, but keeping your sense of humor and imagination is always important.” —Jeremy Dickson



Lelash is constantly inspired by Cartoon Network talent on shows like *Uncle Grandpa*

Obsessed

What can't you get enough of right now?



Randi Zuckerberg

Founder and CEO, Zuckerberg Media

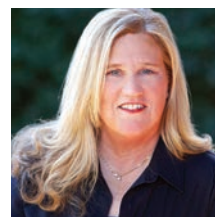
My family is currently obsessed with: **GoldiBlox** building kits for toddlers (yay engineering!), **Munchery** (a delivery-only online restaurant with a daily changing menu), our **SWASH machine** (refreshes a garment in minutes) and SiriusXM's “On Broadway” channel.



Reed Berglund

CEO, FullBottle Group

I'm obsessed with ridiculous musical lyrics and hooks like the ones from **Jibbs'** “Chain Hang Low” and “CoCo” by **O.T. Genasis**. I'm fascinated by the popularity of bizarre phrases and rhymes.



Irene Weibel

VP & Head, Nelvana Studio

I am obsessed with the new season of **House of Cards**. I'm not a binge-watcher, but rather old fashioned when it comes to my favorite shows, so I am watching episode by episode and taking my time.

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Canada's TV landscape gets a makeover

Kids producers weigh in after national regulator overhauls protectionist framework of the country's broadcasting system

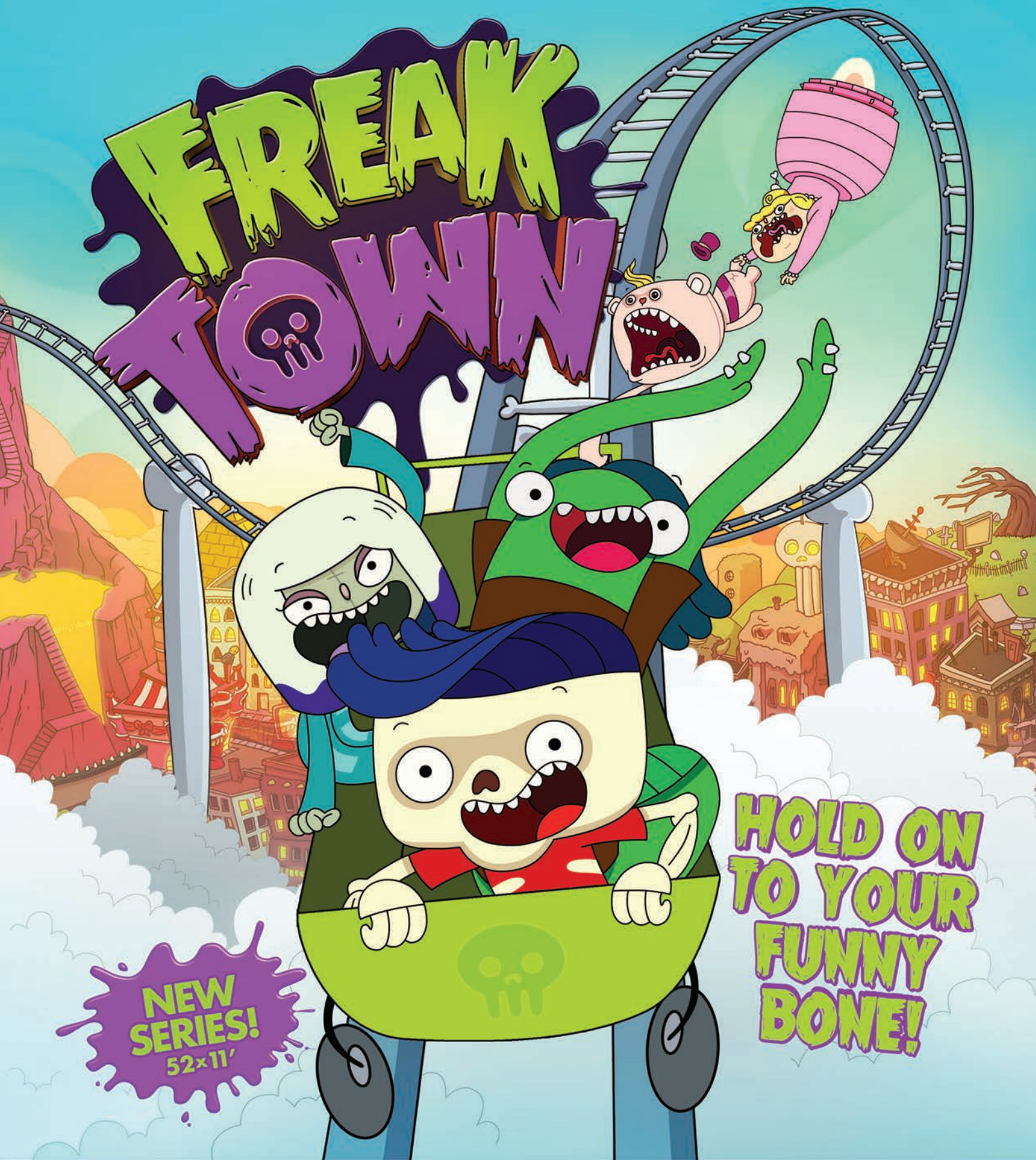
Emphasizing a desire for quality over quantity—read bigger-budget Canadian-made programs that can compete globally—and more consumer choice in the SVOD era, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) announced a raft of decisions in late March that are poised to overturn the Canadian television system as we know it. While the full impact of the major regulations re-write won't be felt immediately on either production or broadcast sides, industry producers absorbing the details have been quick to point out some obvious concerns. Primarily, there are questions surrounding the survival of smaller companies, how broadcasters will allocate funds for fewer more expensive productions, and whether or not US programming will take over schedules now that CanCon requirements have been relaxed.

One of the first significant changes, announced on March 12 by the CRTC, was a reduction from 55% to zero for the amount of Canadian-qualified programs local TV stations are required to broadcast during daytime hours. This amendment allows the CRTC to instead focus on the much stronger Canadian viewership for evening primetime programming. The CRTC is sticking with the requirement that 50% of primetime programming must be Canadian-made, and broadcasters will continue to invest at least 75% of their content into certain programming, including dramas

and documentaries, from indie producers. Reading between the lines, the drop to zero during the day is poised to have a significant impact on Canadian kids content producers—after all, it effects the prime kids TV-viewing daypart. (Notably, Canada's biggest commercial kids broadcasters DHX Media and Corus Entertainment declined comment for this story.)

For Matt Hornburg, co-CEO and executive producer at Toronto's marbledmedia (*Open Heart*, *Hi Opie*, *Splatalot*), it's still early days in terms of assessing the impact of the new CanCon rules, but he says marble will be at an advantage because it previously recognized the need to diversify beyond kids and family content. "Kids and family has definitely been a staple for us the past 14 years," he admits. "But we started diversifying about a year and a half ago, in part because we saw a certain element of fragmentation that was happening in the kids and family space." Hornburg continues: "This announcement actually bodes well for some of our scripted strategy and we've built a really robust primetime scripted slate that we're pitching for the first time this spring both in Canada and the US."

Hornburg contends indie producers that focus solely on the Canadian market and domestic broadcasters may have a tough time under the new regulations. "If you operate your company as a global business like we have, and develop strong partnerships outside of Canada, that's the best way to weather the storm. And like any storm, it will ultimately



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Gumby returns

Henson and the Clokey family team up to bring the iconic stop-motion character back to TV



What's green and classic and turning 60 this year? If you answered Kermit the Frog or Gumby, you'd be right. Created in 1955, both characters are celebrating a milestone in 2015, so it seems fitting that the companies behind their creation are teaming up. With plans to deliver a new full stop-motion series starring Art Clokey's Gumby by fall 2016, The Jim Henson Company and Gumby IP owner Premavision are deep into the development process.

There have been several iterations of Gumby on the small screen, from the first series produced in the 1950s, to three made in the '60s and one that made it to air in the 1980s. More recently, kids VOD network Kabillion acquired the US rights to the Gumby library of more than 208 episodes and Canada's Teletoon Retro is currently airing the series from the '50s and '60s. The flexible green guy also has an active licensing and merchandising program, which is particularly popular in Japan and Australia at the moment. Joe Clokey, Premavision president and son of Art Clokey, estimates that "every 10 to 15 years there's a new wave of interest in Gumby" and we're heading into one now.

As for the new series (title TBD), Henson EVP of children's television Halle Stanford says comedy, focused on serving kids age five to nine, will be the driver. She adds that you can expect to see stories about friendship, courage and technology tinged with the absurdist humor for which Gumby is renowned. "The DNA of Gumby lives in *Adventure Time* and *SpongeBob*," contends Stanford. It will also reflect core attributes that have made the property a success, adds Clokey—adventure, kinesthetic (i.e. bendy) action, everyday heroism, imagination, surrealism and an artistic aesthetic. Faithful sidekicks Pokey and the Blockheads will be back for the ride, too.

Planning a 52 x 11-minute format, Stanford says one thing's for certain, the production will be sticking with the classic Plasticine-like stop-motion animation of the original Gumby. "The look will stand out," she says, noting that the character and background designs will be tweaked to update the property. Currently, Henson and Premavision are looking for co-production partners to get the series off the ground. The hope is that Premavision will use its Gumby-ready studio, which has produced a Gumby direct-to-DVD special and several commercials featuring the character, to animate the series. —Lana Castleman

pass. It's a matter of how strong a shelter you've built," he says. "The money is inevitably going to shrink, so you need to find international partners to pull certain projects off. The last five shows we've produced in Canada all had US or UK money in the financing—and that's a really important distinction."

Frank Falcone, president and creative director of Toronto-based Guru Studio, producer of preschool hit *Justin Time*, agrees that an agile company that understands the global market will be best-suited to survive. "Being content creators is what the whole system is set up to encourage. And that content is supposed to speak to Canadians and the rest of the world," he says. "Anything that intends to support quality over quantity can only be good for Canadian film and television, because it's not a charity, it's a business. Most of the people who are doing very well are treating it like a business."

Another CRTC change that could also significantly affect small and medium-sized producers is the elimination of Terms of Trade (ToT), or the way in which indie producers and broadcasters finalize deals that mitigates the broadcaster's negotiating power and clarifies digital rights. Originally introduced in 2011 with the driving support of the Canadian Media Production Association (CMPA), the CRTC will now allow broadcasters to absent themselves from adhering to ToT agreements, effective April 29, 2016.

"The intent of ToT was ultimately a good thing," says Hornburg. "Many comparisons have been made to the UK industry, and how ToT helped stabilize and capitalize it, but whether ToT was effective or not here is a different story," he adds. "I think in the end we only got halfway there. Not all of the broadcasters abided by it. And the ones that did adhere to it, were certainly looking at how they could break the rules."

So what does the elimination of ToT mean for a medium-sized prodco like marbledmedia? "It will make it challenging," says Hornburg. "Typically in any negotiation, the larger studios are the ones that can really push their weight around. If you have a smaller stake in the negotiation, it will be very challenging for most Canadian companies our size."

As for the CRTC's order to unbundle cable packages and implement pick-and-pay options, Falcone says supply-and-demand laws will start to take over the pricing structures. "It will give consumers choices, but you're probably going to see prices go up. And if channels aren't in demand, it will be a problem for some of the channels that were being supported by the system. It will be a big change," he says.

"But channel unbundling is inevitable—there will be some blood on the road. The bigger problem is that data usage is going to go up. It's a matter of going from an ad-supported system to a subscription- and metered-data system. Any vertically integrated cable company and broadcaster is going to benefit from this in the long run."

—Jeremy Dickson

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Originality first

Emerging prodco Candy Bear looks to grow the kids animation biz in Israel

Who Despite an ongoing lack of government support in its home country, Tel Aviv, Israel-based children's entertainment company Candy Bear is quickly making a name for itself. Since launching in 2011, it has produced high-quality original animated preschool series in partnership with some of the world's most reputable production companies. Candy Bear's first original CGI-animated series *Zack & Quack* (co-produced with Zodiak Kids and Korea's High 1 Entertainment) debuted on Nick Jr. channels in the US and the UK last year. On its next original project, the company joined forces with Corus Entertainment's *Nelvana* (*Little Charmers*) and Dublin, Ireland's Brown Bag Films (*Peter Rabbit*, *Doc McStuffins*) to develop *Cozy Island*, a brand-new CGI-animated girl-centric preschool series. Founded by animation producer Gili Dolev, who returned to his native country in 2008 after spending 10 years in Scotland as the co-founder of animation studio ink.digital, Candy Bear is led by a mix of international talent committed to strong original concepts.

Standing out As a young company looking to make its mark, Dolev says Candy Bear strives to bring unusual concepts to light that can be enjoyed by a broad audience. For *Zack & Quack*, co-creators Dolev and Yvette Kaplan (Candy Bear head of creative content) set the series about an adventurous boy and his best duck friend in a unique pop-up storybook world. "By doing this, we utilize pop-up both visually and as a storytelling device," says Dolev.

Cozy Island, on the other hand, features a different-looking world where all the characters, except main character Naya and her family, are made of cloth. Dolev and Kaplan partnered again to co-create the 52 x 11-minute series and brought *Zack & Quack*'s art director, and Candy Bear head designer, Erez Gavish in to lead the artistic direction of the series.

"We're very fortunate to be in business with Brown Bag and Nelvana and the show is developing beautifully. We'll be heading into production soon," says Dolev.

Candy Bear's newest project in the hopper is *Breeze & the Cloud Thieves*, a 3D/2D hybrid adventure series for upper preschoolers that will be introduced at MIPTV this month.

"It's a different take on imagination, creativity and the thought process," says Dolev, who came up with the concept and enlisted Gavish to art direct and Candy Bear's head of production Ronen Shani to executive produce. (Shani also serves as executive producer on *Zack & Quack* and *Cozy Island*.)

National growth While Israel has exported bigger, world-renowned adult TV formats like *Homeland* and *In Treatment*, Dolev says there are very few subsidies for kids

programming, which makes it difficult for the handful of animation studios working in the country to create original properties.

"Most are service providers and produce 3D and 2D at a very high level, but companies are really struggling with developing their own IPs and getting them commissioned. It seems we are the first ones to have a big international show," says Dolev. "The rebuilt Jerusalem Film Fund will hopefully support the animation industry more broadly. They seem keen on doing this, but it's early days in terms of government support."

Moving forward, Candy Bear is looking for broadcast and production partners on *Breeze* and wants to develop a digital component alongside the TV content. And while original concepts will remain the focus, Dolev says the prodco wants to take on more service work, too. —Jeremy Dickson



Candy Bear will introduce its newest series, *Breeze & the Cloud Thieves*, at MIPTV

Know your audience

By Jim Benton



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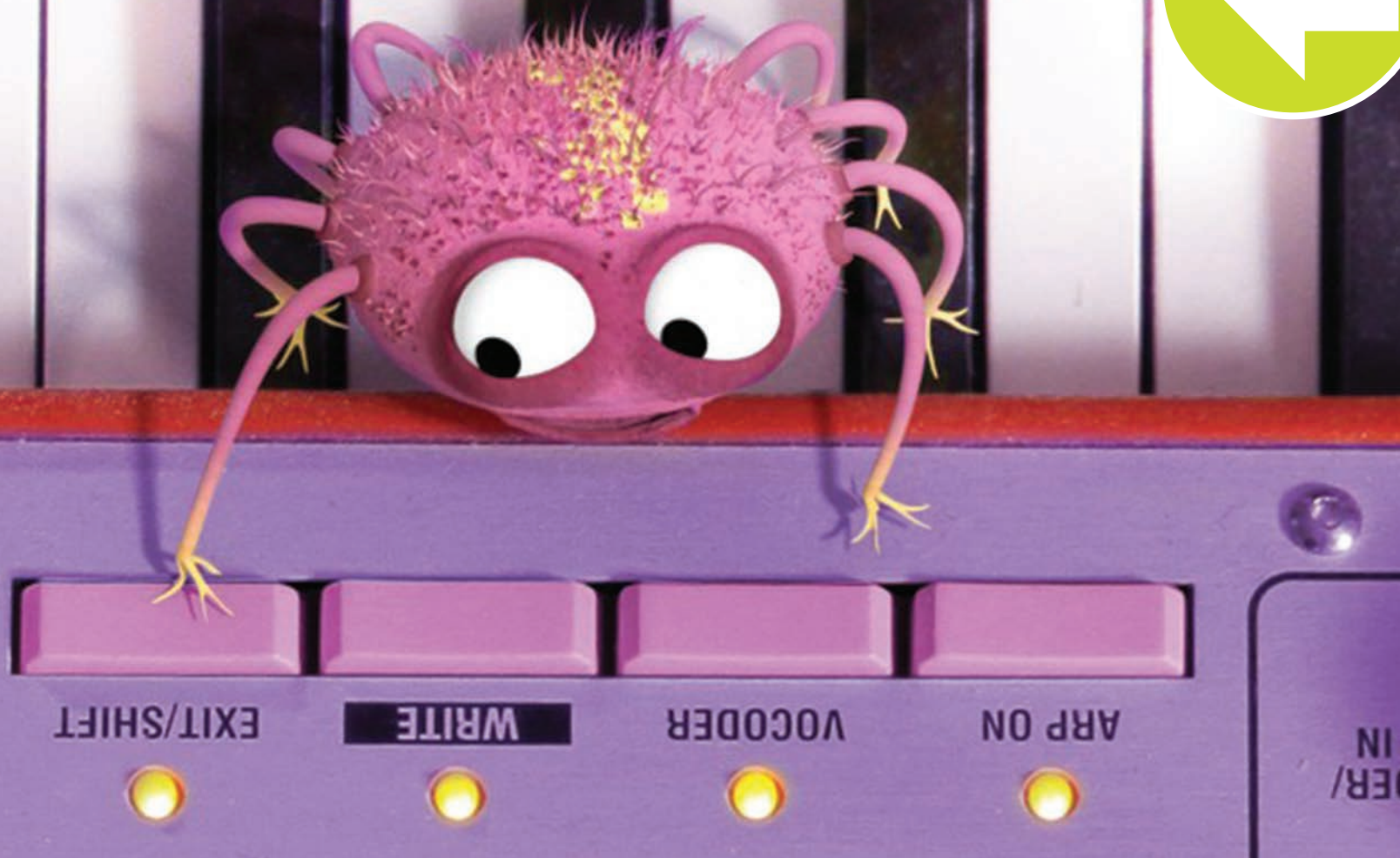
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Helsinki-based Anima Vitae's *Fleak* is its first kids project to use the company's Glove Animation tech



Small-market mojo

How Dutch prodco **Submarine** and Nordic studio **Anima Vitae** are wielding unique animation techniques in the name of quality and efficiency

BY JEREMY DICKSON

At last year's Cartoon Forum, a number of development projects from the Netherlands and the Nordic region pushed the boundaries of what animation can look like and how it can be created. Two of those projects, *Fox and Hare* from Amsterdam-based prodco Submarine and *Fleak* from Helsinki, Finland's Anima Vitae, are particularly representative of how producers from smaller European territories are getting attention from broadcasters by taking animation techniques in creative new directions without sacrificing story.

Anima Vitae, for its part, has been one of the leading animation studios among the Nordic countries for more than a decade.

Its 2008 CGI feature *Niko and the Way to the Stars* boasts sales to 118 countries and a European Film Awards nomination. The film's sequel, *Niko 2: Little Brother, Big Trouble*, followed in 2012, and plans are now in the works for a *Niko* TV series.

But Anima Vitae's current obsession is original 26 x five-minute preschool series *Fleak*—the studio's first kids project to use Glove Animation, a proprietary technique that merges puppet and 3D animation with live-action footage.

Southwest of the Baltic Sea, Submarine (*Kika and Bob*, *Picnic with Cake*) has been a transmedia leader since launching in 2000 with content spanning documentaries,

live-action, features, interactive and animation. And like *Anima Vitae*, it's not averse to new production methods.

The company's latest, *Fox and Hare*, is its first project to merge 3D animation with clay modelling. It's also the prodco's second preschool series (after its distinctly designed 13 x five-minute *Picnic with Cake*) to be based on picture books by acclaimed Netherlands-based illustrator Thé Tjong-Khing.

A no-fear mentality

According to Submarine co-founder Bruno Felix, public broadcaster funding for kids animation in the Netherlands is not a high priority so producers have to tell stories in slightly different ways to compete in the broader market.

"As a producer from the Netherlands, I can only produce my projects if I'm capable of convincing a lot of people from other countries to broadcast my content on their channels," Felix says.

"Launching a show from a country where you know you can finance no more than a quarter of a budget means that you have to stand out. If I cannot create content that has an original tone or way of storytelling, then nobody will see it."

To best adapt the very tactile illustrations of the *Fox and Hare* books to a 52 x 11-minute TV series format, Submarine knew it had to get creative.

Project evolution

"We always have an open mind to technology, so we used a technique specifically designed for this show where we model in clay and scan our models to digital. Then we animate in Maya against a '2.5D' background with clay model props," says Felix.

The decision to use a degree of 3D animation, he notes, came from the need to get closer to the characters with the camera than it did on previous projects. *Picnic with Cake*,

for example, was filmed in a "wide-angle perspective" and told shorter stories through events and action rather than dialog—so there was no need for extreme close-ups.

Netherlands pubcaster KRO was quick to realize the potential of *Fox and Hare*, having previously commissioned Submarine's *Picnic with Cake* in 2011.

"Submarine has a real eye for specific quality, which makes it interesting for us to work with them," says Gerdie Snellers, editor-in-chief of KRO daily magazine *Kindertijd*.

When asked about the Netherlands' reputation in artistic design-based fields, she notes that Holland has several art academies and festivals for young people who are trying to cross borders with film and animation.

"There is a lot happening here. I am always surprised by the variety of animated content in this small country," says Snellers.

With early financing from KRO and Belgium's RTBF and Ketnet, Submarine is currently scripting *Fox and Hare* with story support from development partners Walking the Dog (*The Secret of Kells*, *Picnic with Cake*) from Brussels and UK-based Cake Entertainment.

"We're working on the tone of the story to make it possible for a specialty network to embrace it as something that could work for them, but we're still respecting the underlying IP and its DNA," says Cake CEO and creative director Tom van Waveren.

Felix expects to finalize the team that will produce the series by Cartoon Forum 2015 and will then look to partner with either Disney, the BBC, or a French or German broadcaster.

As for *Anima Vitae*, the company sees great long-term opportunities across TV and gaming for its Glove Animation technique, which can produce high-quality animation in a short period of time, giving creators more time to concentrate on story.



Book adaptation *Fox and Hare* is Submarine's first production to merge 3D animation with clay modelling

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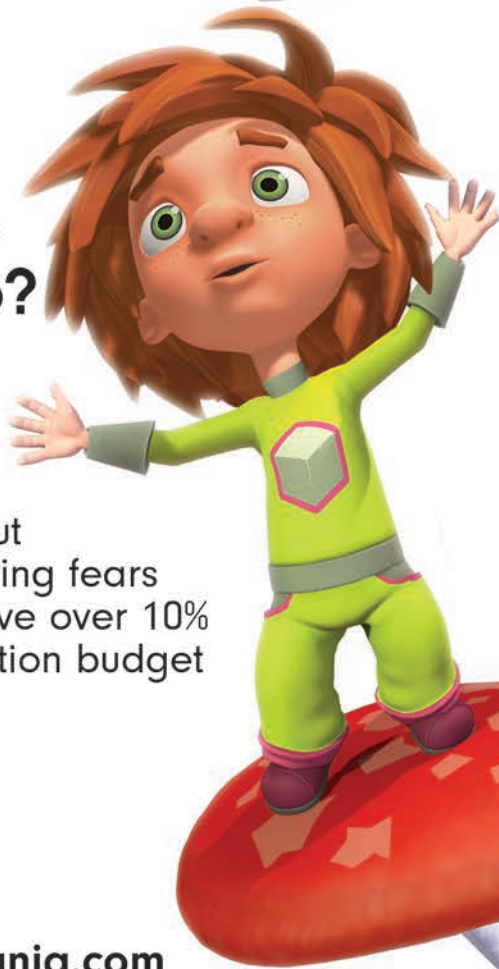


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Efficiency rules

Director and head of animation Antti Haikala says the studio began developing its own software and production pipeline tools in its first years after work on a topical/political satire series. *Daily Ape Show* required the studio to produce 30 minutes of new animation every week.

"This was the initial push for us to go so deeply into research and development work, and it also encouraged us to make original series," says Haikala.




Anima Vitae's Glove Animation evolved from a lip-sync tool to a puppeteering system that can produce high-quality animation in a short period of time

Considering the size of the company and the costs that come with R&D, Haikala says Anima Vitae has to be a shrewd investor. "Finland has five million people, so if you do a project that is financed from this territory, you don't get much money per minute," says Haikala. "You need to really think about how to spend the money you do get. And it's about maintaining quality. We have to really fight for this in our small Nordic countries."

Glove Animation was initially developed in 2009 and first used in a series of short films Anima Vitae made for the Shanghai World Expo. Drawing inspiration from Jim Henson's Muppets and the workings of motion capture, the studio has since evolved Glove Animation from a lip-sync tool into a puppeteering system.

"I wouldn't say Glove is better than mo-cap, but it is different and it forces you to think about puppeteering more than just copying movements. With mo-cap, you usually have just one system per studio. Calibration takes time. You need certain kinds of lighting. You can't have magnetic interference," contends Haikala. "With Glove, it's already attached to computer work stations that are ready to go. You could have five animators working beside each other all in one room."

With development support from the Finnish Film Foundation and The Finnish Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture, Anima Vitae is currently using Glove on the pilot for *Fleak*, and is in partnership discussions with YLE Finland and other international broadcasters. The mostly non-verbal series follows the adventures of a small alien bug adjusting to life in the real world among children.

"We're still developing the technique and how to use it in production," says Haikala. "In *Fleak*, where there is not so much dialog, we need to find other ways to use Glove in the action. It's really handy for moving the mouths and heads of characters, but we need to develop something else to be able to make full character animation." 

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Star power



CalArts grad and *Star vs. The Forces of Evil* creator/executive producer Daron Nefcy talks fandom and showrunning

tute of the Arts, Nefcy's childhood dream came true.

It was Disney that agreed to turn one of Nefcy's concepts into an animated series for Disney XD entitled *Star vs. The Forces of Evil*. It follows the multi-universe adventures of teen princess Star Butterfly, who is sent to Earth by her royal parents to live with a new family after receiving an all-powerful magic wand for her 14th birthday. The series debuted digitally on Disney XD's WATCH platform ahead of its March 30 television premiere in the US. Driven by fervent online fan support, Disney also ordered a second season ahead of the show's TV launch. Nefcy, whose additional credits include Disney XD's *Wander Over Yonder* and Nickelodeon's *Robot and Monster*, spoke with *Kidscreen* about the program's development process and the state of showrunning for female creators.

Where did the idea for the series come from?

It started as a doodle in my third year of college. When I

Ever since she was a fanatical Sailor Moon fan in fourth grade, who longed for magical powers of her own, L.A. native and aspiring artist Daron Nefcy knew she wanted to create a television series. Years later, after moving from doodles to gallery success in L.A.'s underground art community and earning a degree from the renowned California Insti-

brought the idea to Disney, the character was a little girl without magic powers who wanted to be Sailor Moon, which was sort of like me. Then it was suggested that she could be older and actually have powers, so I went home, wrote a new version and that's what it is now.

What was the reaction after the opening segment screened at San Diego Comic-Con last year?

There's always a fear when you create a new thing that people won't like it, but people did seem to like the theme song, which was great. Then the song went online and got more exposure, and a lot of fan art came from that, which was so cool. I was not expecting the reaction, but it's exciting to see people connect with it so much.

How did CalArts prepare you to be a showrunner?

I got to make my own short film each year and I had the best time doing that. You have to do everything from creating an idea and characters to designing, writing, storyboarding and casting. The experience really helped.

Would you like to see more female showrunners in the industry?

I would certainly like to see more female-led series and more women running their shows. It will happen. I've been told that the latest CalArts grad class is 70% female. My class in 2005 was about 40% female—and that was a big deal. But there is incredible male and female talent. It's really cool that Disney is airing the series on XD, which is traditionally more of a boys network, so I hope the other networks follow suit. I feel half of cartoons should have female leads. —Jeremy Dickson

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Gloob's newest original series, *Buuu: A Call To Adventure*, is expected to be a ratings hit

Staying relevant to Brazilian kids

Globosat's 24-hour kids channel Gloob grows its linear and VOD audience

The challenge Nearing its third anniversary in June, Brazilian kidscaster Gloob continues to make good on its promise to expand its multiplatform presence and provide high-quality locally produced content. Boasting a 70% market penetration of Brazil's pay-TV subscription base (up from 55% in 2012), and a potential reach of 40 million people, the linear channel saw more than 50% ratings growth (+56% for total day and +77% in kids primetime), from August 2012 to December 2014 in Brazil, according to ratings agency Ibope. Gloob also reported incremental TV Everywhere growth, thanks to the performance of its VOD web platform Globosat Play.

"In 2014, our first-ever local live-action production, *D.P.A. Detectives do Prédio Azul* (*Blue Building Detectives*), was the most-watched program on Now, Brazil's leading VOD operator," says Gloob director Paulo Marinho.

"We're building our relevance. We have three events now that cover most of Brazil, and our new free VOD subscription app, *Gloob Play*, launched this month for iOS and Android mobile devices. It gives kids access to our shows and games anytime, anywhere, so we are on a good track."

The programming Since launching in 2012 with one local production (*D.P.A.*), Gloob's locally produced content for its primetime audience (11 a.m. to 2 p.m./5 p.m. to 9 p.m.) has grown to 45%.

"This has been our main differentiation. We've been able to develop content that has a very good fit with Brazilian kids," says Marinho, adding that long-running hit *D.P.A.* has expanded successfully across video games, eBooks and physical books, too. "Our first kids telenovela *Gaby Star* was also up for an Emmy in 2014. We didn't win, but were very happy with the nomination."

Gloob currently has high hopes for its newest original live-action series, *Buuu: A Call To Adventure* (pictured), which debuted in Brazil on March 10.

For acquired programming, which makes up 80% of Gloob's full-day portfolio, the channel has done well with a number of strong animated series including *Pac-Man*, *Angry Birds*, *Robin Hood* and *Peter Pan*. It also recently snapped up two Sinking Ship Entertainment series, *Odd Squad* and *Annedroids*, and inked an exclusive co-pro deal with PGS Entertainment for *ALVINNN!!! and the Chipmunks* from Bagdasarian Productions and OuiDO! Productions. According to Marinho, *ALVINNN!!!* will launch in June with the anniversary of the channel.

"Having exclusivity on that IP in Brazil will be huge. We've been more proactive in the international market with big animation brands on the acquisitions side, which makes a big difference," he says.

Looking ahead Marinho says the biggest challenge for Gloob, beyond competing with established global brands like Disney, Discovery Kids and Nick, is that the pay-TV subscription base in Brazil needs to grow.

"It's had a huge growth since 2008, but now it's slowing down. The growth of VOD platforms and the ongoing fragmentation of media with digital IP coming in strong like YouTube Kids is a challenge for all linear broadcasters," he says.

—Jeremy Dickson

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Since hopping to air on CBeebies in June 2014, animated series *Bing* from UK-based Acamar Films, in partnership with Dublin's Brown Bag Films and London-based Tandem Films, has been quick to resonate with its preschool audience. Based on the books by award-winning author/illustrator Ted Dewan, *Bing* celebrates the real-life ups and downs of preschoolers and the grownups in their lives as seen from the perspective of three-year-old rabbit, Bing Bunny. With more than 22.6 million downloads on BBC's iPlayer since its debut, the series is a bona fide multiplatform hit that continues to roll out globally.

JustLaunched

It's a Bing thing

Emotional narrative According to Acamar CEO and *Bing* executive producer Mikael Shields, the 78 x seven-minute series, which also airs on ABC Australia and S4C Wales, stands apart because the stories are not plot-driven.

"The stories are essentially micro-dramas or emotional narratives told in real time," Shields says. "Things do happen moment to moment, but they happen in the service of an emotional narrative. If Bing bangs his head, it hurts. If he loses something, he gets upset."

Like the books, *Bing* features the title character and his trusty companion Flop, but a bevy of new characters—Bing's friends and the grownups in each of their lives—were created especially for the adapted TV series.

And to cut through the preschool clutter, Shields says the co-producers were adamant that they would make the series differently.

"We often come up against an 'it's kids TV' mentality, meaning programs have to be made a particular way, which is usually a lower-budget way for efficiency. But it's almost never a better way," he says. "So we made the episodes of *Bing* like short films. We used a writing-team approach, we commissioned a feature film company to do regular cinematic foley, and we also edited in a more spacious, less repetitive way."

Licensing strategy In advance of the brand's TV debut and to develop a global publishing, licensing and

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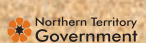
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digital campaign, Acamar signed a multi-territory representation deal with The Licensing Company (TLC). Children's publisher HarperCollins was then appointed to re-issue Ted Dewan's entire series of original *Bing* books.

"We began seeding the marketplace with the reissued books nine months ahead of the TV launch to focus on the literary heritage of the brand," says Shields. (HarperCollins also just introduced large-format activity and sticker books, as well as a new range of TV tie-in books for *Bing*.)

"Television tie-in books are tricky because what you usually get is repurposed screen material that was never really set up for publishing. But we've designed the assets from scratch. The ones that are out already are performing well and we're releasing another eight between now and next year," says Shields.

In addition a line of toys from the IP's global master toy licensee Fisher-Price will launch in the UK by the end of this year.

Broadcasting/social media presence Several new deals with international broadcasters secured by distributor Aardman will see *Bing*'s reach expand this year, and the IP continues to take off on social media, boasting 10,000 Facebook likes to date. —Jeremy Dickson

On-air



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What's bubbling up in kid content culture










Odd Squad brings math to the masses


PBS KIDS is once again proving that if you present math content in fun, original ways, kids will seek it out. That's exactly what's happening with *Odd Squad*, the broadcaster's new live-action comedic math series for kids ages five to eight from co-producers Sinking Ship Entertainment and The Fred Rogers Company. According to Nielsen ratings, the show's January 19 special, "Odd Squad Saves the World," drew more than 3.7 million US broadcast viewers to PBS. It also generated 44.5 million video streams across PBS digital platforms and attracted nearly two million users to the Odd Squad website (Google Analytics). And for the month of January alone, the series tallied more than 70 million video streams, further proving the success and credibility of the US Department of Education's Ready To Learn program, which funds the series. —Jeremy Dickson

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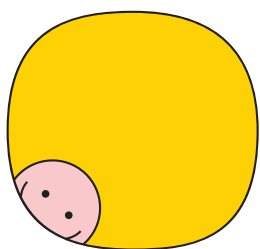








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Anki's Overdrive is poised to shift robotic battle-car racing into the next gear

Second-round knockout?

Toys that marry virtual and real-world play head back to the retail ring

BY PATRICK CALLAN

Activision's Skylanders burst onto the toy scene in 2011 using near-field communication that lets kids import physical characters into a console game, effectively bridging the gap between virtual and real-world play. Given the unprecedented success of this property, whose revenue has surpassed US\$3 billion at retail, scores of toycos scrambled to follow suit and quickly cranked out their own interactive hybrid toys. None met with Activision's success and the trend faded. Enter New York Toy Fair 2015.

The show floor at Javits was flooded with virtual-cum-real-world play-things that combine digital games and physical toys that interact with smartphone and tablet apps. Many big industry players like Spin Master, Mattel and Crayola, in fact, are now vying for market share in this space, but they're up against some steep competition.

To name a few, there's category vet Activision, which is releasing a fifth version of Skylanders this fall, and newcomer Anki, whose game/toy hybrid Drive was the second-best-selling item on Amazon.com's toy list in December. Anki is now gearing up to release an updated version of the game this fall, Overdrive, and if the standing-room only crowds around its Javits demos are any indication, it may be a can't-miss proposition.

Pole position

Combining innovative toys with cutting-edge robotics, Overdrive takes the battle racing experience to a new level, where players can take on friends or enemy AI commanders. "We really believed that we could use robotics to make toys intersecting with video games better than anything else," says Hanns Tappeiner, president and co-founder of the San Francisco, California-based company. "You have to make sure the technology isn't just there for technology's sake, but to actually make a better product."

Using a robotics technique called positioning to monitor cars and make sure they don't go off the track, each car's camera takes 500 pictures per second of the track and transfers the information to a player's smartphone. Players control their cars by tilting their phones and can access features like turbo bursts and 180-degree turns through the game's free app. An Overdrive starter kit will retail for US\$150 and expansion packs will cost between US\$10 and US\$30 apiece.

While Anki is busy perfecting Overdrive for the game's September release in the US, UK and Germany, it has also been fielding calls from several companies interested in licensing. "It's not just car models. There are certain types of video games, or even movies, where you could do very beautiful licensing models so they're like a completely different universe," he says.

From the ground up

Spin Master's Sick Bricks lets kids optically beam characters into a gaming app to protect its central city from attack by an evil overlord and his goons. For this game, the toyco uses refined 3D facial recognition to capture and bring to life the smallest of details. "It can recognize something that is the size of a two-by-two building brick as being a distinct head and body of a character," says Johnny O'Neal, marketing director for Sick Bricks.



With Sick Bricks, Spin Master believes it has cracked the app/toy code

Low price-points (collectible characters cost less than US\$2 each when you buy a pack of five) and the game's ground-up design for today's kids who expect their toys to live digitally and physically, could help it stand out, he adds. "An earlier generation of toy companies, including ourselves, tried to create toy and app experiences where the toy simply wasn't adding enough value for what it cost," says O'Neal. "Consumers made it clear they don't want a US\$15 toy unlocking a US\$99-cent app."

O'Neal says the Sick Bricks concept could be applied to any kind of toy, not just small collectibles, and the business model has the company's top executives excited because it delivers twice the value to the toys. Spin Master has also had preliminary discussions about bringing optical beaming to top licenses. Sick Bricks launched at retail in March with packs of figures ranging from US\$2.49 to US\$6.99, as well as a three-in-one playset for US\$17.99.

Lights, camera, animation

An extension of its *Color Alive* app, which allows kids to bring their drawings to life with movement and sound, Crayola's upcoming Easy Animation Studio (US\$24.99) takes things one step further by letting kids create their own animated movies.

Users can design their own characters with colored pencils and crayons and then import them into the app. Then they put a mannequin on a stand in front of the camera and place it in different poses, confirming each one in the app. The app captures the movements through glyphs on the mannequin and fuses them together through smooth-action technology, which kids can play back when they're done.

"Kids love creating and sharing their own videos,



Crayola's Color Alive Easy Animation Studio brings drawings to life with the help of a poseable mannequin

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Mattel turned to Google for the tech to fuel its 21st-century version of View-Master



but animation creation has typically been difficult and time-consuming,” says Jordan Howell, Crayola’s virtual product manager. “*Color Alive* allows them to take their physical creativity to the virtual world.”

Crayola already has many licenses in its *Color Alive* franchise and will continue to add favorite characters to the product portfolio, he adds. “We’re excited about launching Easy Animation Studio and changing coloring forever.”

Brave new 3D world

Mattel and Google, meanwhile, have joined forces to give a popular 76-year-old stereoscopic toy a modern facelift. The reimagined View-Master works with Google’s Cardboard technology and lets kids experience and learn about famous places, landmarks, nature and planets via virtual reality. It works by combining an app, an experience reel, and an Android smartphone, which slides neatly into the device.

“By infusing technology and innovation with this classic toy, we are giving kids an enhanced experience allowing for play opportunities not yet imagined through new, digitally curated content,” says Aslan Appleman, Mattel’s senior director of advanced concepts. “The challenge to bridging the gap is to ensure you are not forcing an unnatural play experience.”

Mattel is looking for ways to leverage the technology to deliver unique experiences from both a content and physical product perspective, and the company will announce

licensing and developer partners closer to the product’s fall launch. “The most important thing is for us to deliver a quality, family-friendly experience, so we will take the time to ensure whatever we bring to market can deliver that for our consumers,” Appleman says.

The View-Master and a sample experience reel will cost US\$29.99. Additional packs with four themed reels will sell separately for US\$14.99.

The viability of v2.0

With all these companies lining up to once again take on the interactive hybrid/toys-to-life toy market, one thing’s for certain—not everyone will be a winner. However, there are certain attributes that point to a likely success.

Richard Gottlieb, toy industry insider and publisher of *The Global Toy Report*, says growth in this category is being driven by the realization that 21st-century children and their millennial parents live in a much bigger universe than 20th century parents. “They don’t really see a bright line between what’s virtual and what’s real,” he says. “And you can really see that with young children, who when given a magazine, will press on the pictures like it’s a tablet.”

Toy industry analyst at market research firm The NPD Group, Alex Teper, says more kids are using tablets and connected devices than ever before, and this trend is only going to grow in the near future. “The internet is infiltrating just about everything a child plays with, which promises to make physical toys much more fun and emotionally resonant,” he says. According to The NPD Group, the US toys-to-life market swelled 22% from 2013 to 2014 and is now worth upwards of US\$425 million.

While the toy industry sees some innovation in classic play patterns and categories each year, tech is where the needle can really be moved, notes Adrienne Appell, Toy Industry Association trend specialist. And this category is unique in that it makes traditional toys relevant for today's kids. "With some of these toys, you're able to play with or without a device, so it's a great way to get kids engaged and excited about something, but not have them in front of a screen 24/7," she says.


The integration of old- and new-world toys works best when kids can get the most out of the tangible toy space and the interactivity of the digital world, explains tech guru Marc Saltzman. "It can't be gimmicky," he says, which was a big problem early on in the category. "The consumer didn't see really any value in buying the physical product. It just didn't feel right. It wasn't intuitive. It was very limited and very linear. And as a result, you can buy it for a dollar now." He cites Mattel's Appitivity and WowWee's AppGear as two prime examples.

Gottlieb agrees. Previous versions of the technology were mostly add-ons and didn't bring anything useful to the table. "It was two separate experiences," he says, adding category leaders like Activision's Skylanders and challengers Disney Infinity are succeeding because the game-play experience is seamless. "The separation between the digital and physical is being erased. It's a really important development in play," he says.

What's different about this iteration of toys-to-life, according to Appell, is toymakers have figured out how to use the technology in a smart way to make the toys more fun and engaging. "Kids aren't going to care whether or not the toy has technology.

The technology needs to make sense," she says.

That's especially true for today's kids, who are digital natives, not digital immigrants, says Saltzman. "This whole Minecraft generation, these kids love building digital worlds and then bringing them into the real world through augmented reality," he says.

Teper adds one of the biggest advantages of toys that connect to apps is toymakers can create physical toys with their own personalities that aren't necessarily borrowed from other media. "Connected toys often make for a far more powerful experience than a game rendered only in pixels on a two-dimensional tablet," he contends. 

"The internet is infiltrating just about everything a child plays with, which promises to make physical toys much more fun and emotionally resonant."

—Alex Teper, The NPD Group

Licensee Lowdown

Alex Brands gets into inbound licensing



Alex Brands has high hopes for its Shrinky Dinks brand featuring licensed Nickelodeon characters

Who Less than four months after taking the helm at Alex Brands, president and CEO Neil Friedman has steered the Fairfield, New Jersey-based toyco into previously uncharted licensing waters. But given his consumer products expertise, which he honed during his years at Mattel and the US division of Toy 'R' Us, it would appear the company is in good hands.

What For the first time, Alex Brands has acquired an entertainment license. In this case, the new multi-year deal with Nickelodeon Consumer Products will see Alex Brands' products sporting SpongeBob Square Pants, Dora and Friends and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. At New York Toy Fair, the company unveiled more than 30 new licensed Nickelodeon products for the three properties ahead of their retail launch this fall. Prices will range from roughly US\$5 to US\$20 per item, according to Friedman.

Latest innovation For Alex Brands, whose iconic Slinky turned 70 this year, the move into full-scale character licensing

marks a change in strategy. With licensing now making up 31% of total US toy industry sales, according to recent reports from market research firm The NPD Group, Friedman says the company would be remiss not to explore this arena to grow its business. "I think the opportunity for Alex Brands to combine with great licenses is really something that's exciting and important to our business going forward," he says.

What's next Friedman says Alex Brands selected the three Nickelodeon properties because of their popularity, but hinted more licensing deals could be in the pipeline. "This is just what we're starting with and are able to get to market this year," he says. The December 2014 acquisition of Shrinky Dinks is also expected to be a key licensing revenue stream, he says, and the company will also look at inbound licensing across its range of brands. "We feel there are more opportunities in the marketplace and we're going to explore them," he says.

Contact Sally Lawrence, marketing manager, Alex Brands (973-747-3198, slawrence@alexbrands.com) —Patrick Callan

Talk of the town

Internet-connected conversational toys make their mark in New York

BY PATRICK CALLAN

CogniToys and Hello Barbie rightfully drew their fair share of “oohs” and “aahs” from techies and toycoos alike when they were unveiled to the world at New York Toy Fair in February.

These new physical-digital toys can hold conversations with kids by sourcing answers to their questions from cloud-based platforms and then respond in real time. Internet connectivity means they can be continuously updated and improved, and they are designed to learn about and evolve with children over time. While the two speech-enabled toys may sound very similar, the companies behind the tech differ in many ways.

Powered by IBM Watson’s cognitive technology and its own speech-recognition platform, Elemental Path’s CogniToys dinosaur can answer thousands of questions—and even tell jokes. A press of its belly gets the conversation started.

Hello Barbie lets kids have a two-way conversation with the iconic fashionista for the first time ever



Founded in 2014, the New York-based company launched CogniToys on Kickstarter in mid-February with a goal of raising US\$50,000 in 30 days—it reached the target within 24 hours. The first dinos will be available through Kickstarter in November for US\$99.99 each and are expected to head to retail in 2016. But Elemental Path’s co-founder Donald Coolidge explains the company is not looking to become a toy maker, per se.


“We’re more a technology company,” he says, adding business plans include improving its platform and working with companies to build educational products, like the dinos, which have learning modules that becoming increasingly challenging. The toy is also designed to let parents monitor their children’s progress and moderate content.

Following the buzz from Toy Fair and Kickstarter, Elemental Path has been in serious talks with “several of the major players” and expects to announce a tech-licensing partnership soon. “It would be us working strategically with one partner to build a product together—an established and well-known brand using our technology to give it that fun and educational play,” says Coolidge.

San Francisco, California’s ToyTalk, meanwhile, made a licensing play with Mattel’s Hello Barbie, which is powered by ToyTalk’s PullString conversational character technology. By connecting Barbie to an app and WiFi, kids can ask her questions, engage in conversation and play games, thanks to a built-in microphone and speaker. After the initial set-up, Barbie works without a smart device. The doll is expected to be ready for Christmas 2015 sales, totaling an SRP of US\$74.99.

ToyTalk was founded in 2011 and has raised more than US\$31 million in funding from a number of investors. In addition to licensing its technology, the company is also in the app-creation business. It launched the first-ever talk-and-touch speech-recognition app *Speakalegend* (US\$1.99) last September, which lets kids converse with mermaids, fairies and dragons. The company now has four apps available on the market, two free and two paid, and will be launching a paid *Thomas and Friends* app with Mattel in late June.

ToyTalk hosts all of its characters on a cloud called Puppeteer, with which its apps also connect to engage in conversation. However, algorithms do not generate dialog for the characters. Everything they say or don’t say comes from the hands of writers, says Oren Jacob, ToyTalk’s founder and CEO. “Authoring conversation, at a pretty foundational level, is a new form of media. The entity that understands everything is not a character.” In Barbie’s case, there are a lot of things she knows and a lot she doesn’t, he adds.

Since news of the toy broke, more than a few eyebrows have been raised over privacy concerns. So who is listening and what happens to the conversations between kids and Hello Barbie? “The recorded conversions are stored on our secure servers where parents can log in and listen to them at any time or delete them as they wish,” explains Jacob, adding that ToyTalk and Mattel will only use the conversations to operate and improve the product. “We do not, and will not, use any audio from children for marketing, publicity or advertising purposes.” 



NAYA
ENCHANTED EARTH #001

Betting its characters based on popular virtual world *Animal Jam* will stand out, IP owner WildWorks is entering the toy market

NAYA

Species: Fox
Enchanted Earth #001

Naya is curious and loyal. She loves socializing with everyone and everything. If it were up to her everything in Jamaa would be pink. Her favorite thing to do in Jamaa is go to parties.



Welcome to the toy jungle

Animal Jam treks from virtual to real world with its first master toy deal

As one of the most popular web-based games and social networks for kids prepares to enter the toy realm, it's hard not to ask, "What took so long?" More than four years after IP owner WildWorks launched *Animal Jam*, the Utah-based company appointed New York's Commonwealth Toy & Novelty as the brand's master toy licensee.

The free-to-play social game (with an option to subscribe for US\$6.95/month) that lets kids discover science and nature through licensed National Geographic content now has more than 30 million users in 150 countries. It's also available in five languages—English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German. Although it's currently adding more than 1.2 million new users per month, WildWorks CEO Clark Stacey says the brand's fan base has grown at a steady—not meteoric—pace.

Instead of trying to create a full consumer products program right out of the gate, the company decided the most important thing was to focus on perfecting the game itself. "We saw some players come out and sign a bunch of licensees and flood the market with merchandise, and by the time the stuff actually came out, they were gone," he explains. "We're looking to build a property here that hopefully our grandchildren are going to be experiencing."

While final details are still being hammered out, Commonwealth's first wave of toys will include a range of plush and figurines based on new and exclusive *Animal Jam* characters. Targeting its core fans—girls ages seven to 11—the Enchanted Earth line is expected to be available online and

at retail in the US this summer, followed by a worldwide roll-out. Prices will range between US\$5 and US\$20.

Stacey contends the most compelling aspect of *Animal Jam* is that it lets kids have their own unique style, and any time a new animal avatar is released, it is immediately in high demand. "We think that's what's going to really drive Enchanted Earth's popularity," he says. "These characters don't look like any others in the world."

In addition to toys, another pillar of the consumer products program will be the worldwide launch of the *Animal Jam* tablet-based app for iOS and Android in June. Looking to avoid what he calls the "rapacious trend" in kids apps of monetizing through consumables or in-app purchases, the app will be free-to-play and additional animal avatars can be purchased for a small fee through eBooks featuring the animals. "Parents need to be able to visualize that this is not going to be a constant money pit for them. There is a finite ceiling to the potential spend," he says.

WildWorks' next major announcement will likely be *Animal Jam* apparel licensees this summer, Stacey adds. The company is also in talks with Commonwealth and other potential licensees about launching natural exploration and connected toys for the holidays. And with retail gift cards forming a significant part of the *Animal Jam* business, WildWorks is considering hybrid physical-digital toys that would allow kids to import collectible cards into digital games. "I think that there's going to be a lot of energy around the launch of the tablet app. We hope to capitalize on that and support it with a few other products," says Stacey. —Patrick Callan



Digital platforms are lining up to give kids the mobile, short-form content they crave—say goodbye to kids entertainment as you know it

A video takeover

BY WYNNE TYREE

become the first choice for kids and family entertainment. But far from resting on their laurels, these companies are continuing to push the boundaries and challenge the industry to venture into new territory.

The latest shift—a significant departure from traditional children's entertainment—is the explosion of short-form video, which has been flooding tablets and social media sites. Bite-sized videos are now a staple in children's viewing habits with no signs of being displaced anytime soon. (See "A short-form revolution?" p.58) The industry has yet to agree on a definition for short-form video. YouTube identifies short videos as those with run times of four minutes or less. However, other organizations extend the definition to encompass videos upwards of 15 minutes in length (Screen Writers Guild Of America), or as little as 60 seconds (Webby Awards).

Parameters are in flux because consumer habits and expectations continue to evolve. In 2013, Comscore found that the average length of videos posted online was 5.6 minutes. A year later, that figure fell to 4.3 minutes. The top-performing online videos are even shorter than that, with *Adweek* reporting that the average length of the most popular videos on YouTube is just under three minutes. And then there are the video restrictions imposed by social media networks popular with kids. Vine videos are limited to six seconds, while Snapchat draws the line at 10 ticks, and Instagram at 15 seconds. These factors are joining forces to push for ever-shorter videos—and kids can't get enough.

This may explain why kids' networks are also heartily embracing short-form video and finding ways to repack-age their shows to create short bursts of content. On their websites and apps, videos are brief (excluding the few full episode videos on offer). Nick.com's videos average about a 1.5 minutes. Cartoon Network's *Anything* app sticks to a 15-second format, and DisneyChannel.com's video clips range from a few seconds to a few minutes. For long-form specialists, testing out short-form content gives them a way to engage fans on newer platforms like Vine, Instagram and Snapchat.

For all its benefits—providing quick breaks throughout the day and offering content that's fun to share among friends and family—short-form video isn't replacing long-form viewing. Kids still enjoy sitting down and watching full-length shows and movies. In fact, short-form videos

While still in its infancy, 2015 is shaping up to be the year of children's entertainment. Already Netflix and Amazon Prime have put a central focus on kids, with the former announcing several original programs to compete with the latter's ever-growing slate of kids shows developed through its pilot program. In January, Nickelodeon also announced that it is retooling its sitcom formula to incorporate lessons learned from kids' growing love of the videos they find on YouTube and other social media sites. Meanwhile, Google's YouTube and Twitter's Vine both launched kids apps that are now competing with the purveyors of traditional children's media. Could Instagram Kids be far behind? By the time the year draws to a close, kids entertainment as we know it may well look radically different.

The focus on young media consumers has been growing since the dawn of this decade. In short, the introduction of tablets and streaming services designed with kids in mind forever changed the media landscape. Netflix, YouTube, Amazon Prime and Hulu have been courting kids and parents, striving to grow their entertainment offerings for the youngest video consumers, while simultaneously helping parents feel more comfortable in allowing their children to explore their websites and apps. Just a few years later, we have reached a new plateau—parents and kids have so fully embraced streaming video services, they have

What's so great about... superheroes?

BY SARAH CHUMSKY



Crash! Bam! KaPOW! Good guys win. Bad guys get busted, or bested. That's the formula for a typical superhero story, and it works for kids.

Generations of young people have been captivated by these simple, good vs. evil stories filled with action-packed, tense moments. But when it comes to child development benefits, superheroes are often as unappreciated as a bag of Kryptonite at a Superman convention. The fact is, superhero stories are terrific for teaching kids counterfactual thinking, meaning the ability to imagine alternative scenarios to past events.

For example, say kids see Wonder Woman about to get trampled by Giganta, but then foiling the attempt using her projectile tiara (Note: We hope this is the plot for the 2017 film!). As kids follow the story (and, really, who could look away?), they imagine the worst that could have happened in alternative scenarios. If Wonder Woman were not so quick-witted and able-bodied, then she and her magic lasso may have been flattened against the asphalt. The potential alternative consequence is what makes the story so exciting.

Sometimes counterfactual thinking can lead to negative emotions—feelings of fear, regret, or guilt. But in the superhero realm, it often prompts positive thoughts like relief and pride. Counterfactual thinking is essential for kids because it provides them with the wisdom to make smart decisions moving forward. This may mean avoiding dangerous situations (villain hideouts!), problem-solving (escaping diabolical traps!), or intentionally employing positive behaviors (wearing a bullet-proof unitard!).

Counterfactual thinking is so intrinsic to superhero stories that the industry itself has fostered the concept on a more macro level, creating alternate realities for its well-established worlds. Beginning in the late '70s, Marvel's *What If?* anthology series helped kids think counterfactually. What if Spider-Man had joined the Fantastic Four? What if Captain America had not been lost in World War II? Along similar lines, from the late '50s to the mid-80s, DC Comics published dozens of *Imaginary Stories*, followed by its *Elseworlds* series. Can you imagine how Bruce Wayne would have behaved as a nobleman during the French Revolution? DC did—and then so did its readers.

With the plethora of superhero content being introduced and pushed to kids these days, we can rest assured that kids will come out the victors.



Sarah Chumsky is the VP of **Insight Kids**, a passionate team of business strategists and developmental experts who spend their waking hours pondering and communicating timeless truths and timely trends. Through innovative qualitative and quantitative market research and consulting, they bring the voice of the child to the creative process, helping their clients create products and experiences that meet kids where they are. To connect with Insight Kids, please email info@InsightStrategyGroup.com, or check out www.InsightKids.com.

can drive kids to longer form viewing by introducing potential fans to new shows or IPs. It's easy for kids to invest 30 seconds in a video clip to see if they like it (and therefore the IP it comes from). This tactic can be even better than giving them a free episode, which takes a greater time investment to watch.

At the same time, short-form video is a great way to extend the love of IPs that are driven by long-form content. If a child loves *Frozen*, she can get more of it without re-investing 109 minutes. If a "Ninjago boy" wants to continue the battle after an episode, he can simply tap a video on the Cartoon Network site or app.

Long-form isn't going anywhere—it's where depth of story and character engagement are built. And when kids have time to kick back, relax and be entertained, they are

as likely to tune into a long-form program as they are to spend a half hour exploring a plethora of short clips. But keep an eye on short-form content. We see it continuing to change the children's media landscape by the minute. Along with it, plan to witness the rise of highly emotive and evocative imagery and the value of sight gags. As content gets shorter, creators have less time than ever to hook the viewer and sell the story/joke, so visuals will have to be even more expressive and captivating. **k**



Wynne Tyree is the president of Smarty Pants, a youth and family research and consulting firm.

Heads Up! is derived from the company's daily in-person and digital immersion into kids' and families' lives, as well as proprietary quantitative research. For more information contact Meredith Franck at 914-939-1897 or visit asksmartypants.com.

LAS VEGAS

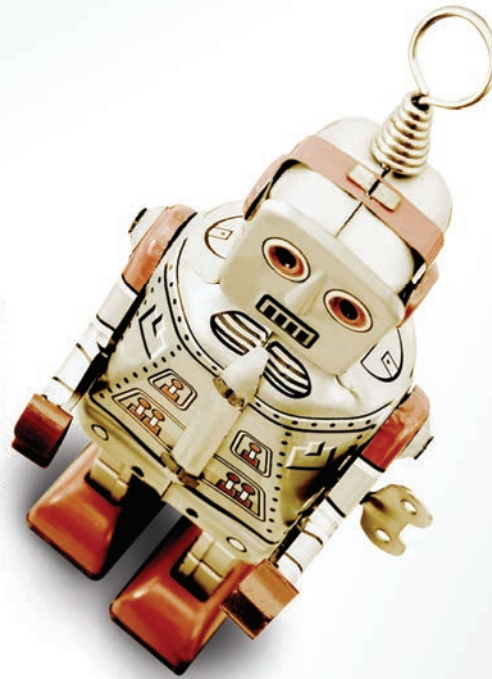
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With its new *YouTube Kids* app, Google has created a platform that rivals traditional kidsnets, or does it?

A new kind of network

BY DANIELA FISHER

Recently, Google-owned YouTube revealed that 50% of its viewers access the video-sharing site from mobile devices. It also noted that kids are increasingly part of this mobile YouTube audience, despite the fact that the site is restricted for under-13s. Overall viewing time was also up by 50% over the past year, and most tellingly, time spent watching family videos rose by a whopping 200%.

So when YouTube unveiled its *YouTube Kids* app (arguably the industry's worst-kept secret of 2014) in February, it was clear that the video giant was taking the spike in kid viewership seriously. It's YouTube's first

standalone app for children, and the iOS and Android offering is free, COPPA-compliant and supported by ads carefully screened by the company.

Not only does the app signal Google's entry into the kids space, but it promises a platform with to date the largest range of family-friendly content available in a mobile format that's ideally suited for today's young audiences.

As the much-anticipated app has the ability to serve up more content in one place than Nickelodeon, Disney and Cartoon Network combined, it has also created waves of interest—and speculation—in the industry.

"There's this 900-pound gorilla we know has been growing—it's called YouTube and it's all of those millions and millions of hours of content," Children's Technology Review editor Warren Buckleitner comments. "YouTube has built this bridge to that content that's free, fast and passes the gut test in terms of trust—it's a major event."

On a content drive

The key to *YouTube Kids* is its ability to offer curated content. Playlists and channels are divided into four categories:

shows, learning, music and explore. And to ensure its content pipeline is continually full, YouTube has been busy developing partnerships in the industry to grow the channels and videos available on its mobile offering.

For starters, the app is loaded with content from popular branded YouTube channels, like Jim Henson Family TV, National Geographic Kids, DreamWorksTV, Talking Tom and Friends and Mother Goose Club, as well as clips from popular series like *Sesame Street* and HIT Entertainment's *Thomas & Friends*. (Programming offered on the new app and the companies' broader YouTube channels will be the same.)

On the original series side, YouTube is set to feature an exclusive show, *uTech*, from LaVar Burton and Reading Rainbow, along with videos from YouTube stars like the Vlogbrothers and Stampylonghead.

The app will also feature new content from Zodiak Kids, which is launching two new YouTube channels this spring—ZeeKay and ZeeKay Junior. ZeeKay will be geared to kids and tweens, while ZeeKay Junior targets preschoolers.

of the global media strategy for Henson," notes Richard Goldsmith, EVP of global distribution and international consumer products at The Jim Henson Company. "The YouTube universe has evolved tremendously over the last couple of years. They've really put together a world-class team of executives to manage the kids content."

YouTube Kids features the company's Jim Henson Family TV channel, which is a blend of content from older fare like *Fraggle Rock* and *The Wubbulous World of Dr. Seuss*, and current series like *Sid the Science Kid*.

In terms of programming strategy, Henson sees the video-sharing platform as another network to populate. "I really view YouTube as another global kids channel, just like I would view Nickelodeon or Disney," explains Goldsmith. "Now, as we pitch our new development slate to everyone, whether it's a big broadcast network or a global kids network or a subscription VOD platform, we pitch YouTube right along with them." Going forward, the company is looking at working with YouTube on



Fraggle Rock is a mainstay on the Jim Henson Family TV YouTube channel

New channels, new audience

On the audience front, *YouTube Kids* has created a direct pipeline to kids, and a sizeable one at that—in the US alone, a recent eMarketer study estimated that 71% of kids under 12 in the US watch videos online, equalling roughly 17.5 million kids. It also gives linear media a bigger foothold over the screen real estate in kids' pockets.

For YouTube's content partners, the app is a win-win. "YouTube has always been a very important piece

original content, as well as second-screen opportunities for current series.

One company that has worked with YouTube on an original production is Sesame Workshop. Full 11-minute eps of *The Furchester Hotel* (co-produced with UK broadcaster CBeebies) are made available on the *YouTube Kids* app after they premiere on CBeebies.

"The growth [on YouTube] has been very strong and we haven't done a huge promotional campaign for it," notes

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Sesame Workshop EVP of content and distribution Terry Fitzpatrick. “It’s clearly getting viral traction within the YouTube viewing audience. Given the fact it’s longer-form programming, that’s really the perfect platform for it.”

For its YouTube channel, Sesame offers mostly shorter video clips from the series, music videos and parodies, as well as the full-length eps of *Furchester*. Also a content partner for the new app, Sesame approaches programming for *YouTube Kids* as an opportunity to get kids to dive deeper into its content.

“We view it as complementary to broadcast. We don’t really see it as competitive,” Fitzpatrick explains, noting that the video-sharing platform provides relevance and greater access to its content library. “We’re trying to program that content to complement each of the platforms and support them.”

Digital uprising

While content providers have reason to cheer over the new app, traditional linear broadcasters might not be as enthused. Streaming video audiences grew by 60% in the US in 2014, whereas traditional TV viewing was down by 4%, according to Nielsen’s *Total Audience Report*.

“Kids are watching less traditional TV programming and are watching a lot more on YouTube,” notes Denise DeRosa, program manager for the Family Online Safety Institute. “Not that they don’t watch any TV anymore, but they’re watching less TV and watching more on YouTube. They have their favorite YouTube channels, stars and programs—they like to have that in their lap and be able to choose and watch when they want.”

For Dylan Collins, CEO of UK-based kids digital ad network SuperAwesome, the app represents the rise of digital, rather than a total decline in linear broadcasting. “I feel that everyone in the TV world, from the studio to broadcasters, are finally acknowledging just how big digital viewing has become—whether that’s on a tablet device, a mobile device or even on desktop,” notes Collins. “When you look at the decline in a lot of the TV viewing, I think, no matter who you are, you have to accept the fact that viewing habits are changing. Digital is finally starting to catch up in terms of the platforms, the technology and the ecosystem that can support everything else being built around it.”

Buckleitner agrees, describing *YouTube Kids* as a major disrupter for linear media, as kids can find any form of licensed character on the platform. “I think that what content providers have to do is start thinking about how to play along,” he says. “Disney can say, ‘Okay look, we’re going to put up a good quality HD version of *The Lion King* rather than having some pirated version, we’ll serve it up in better quality and make it so a kid wants to watch it.’ I think traditional media will figure it out because they’re better at making linear [video] media than somebody with just a smartphone.”

The advertising question

Perhaps the most controversial part of the app—and its




Sesame’s YouTube Channel checked in *The Furchester Hotel* last year

biggest potential to bring more money to the kids space—is its business model. While YouTube has revealed the app’s limited ad model that features pre-roll ads, the scope of the opportunity for profit has yet to be measured.

“It’s a big deal because there’s such a huge amount of advertising dollars that are still locked in TV that have been trying to get into digital,” says Collins. “The amount that is being spent on digital versus the number of eyeballs that are in digital—when you look at the size of the ad market there, the size of the opportunity is somewhere between US\$10 billion and US\$17 billion.”

Collins sees it as a big step forward for the industry, as ad giant Google has declared that the kids market needs a specific strategy and platform, rather than trying to bundle kids into general audience and family. “When you’re seeing Silicon Valley jump on stuff like this, it means there’s a big wave of activity coming,” contends Collins. “It is galvanizing advertisers across the world to properly look at the kids space now as a viable area to go to for marketing.”

Overall, there are details still to be ironed out with the app. For one, parents are by-and-large not in love the fact it subjects their kids to advertising. It has also been pointed out that the platform skews towards preschool-age children, and does not address older kids.

But going forward, Google—and the kids entertainment industry—stand to gain. “It’s always great to have another strong distribution platform focused on kids,” concludes Sesame’s Fitzpatrick. “As far as different projects that the Workshop and other kids producers can do, there’s a blue sky.” 



New Kid in Town

Coding with character

As the market grows for kid-focused coding games, codeSpark is looking to make its mark in the space with new app *The Foos*

Powering up When Grant Hosford's daughter was six, she wanted to register for a Lego robotics course. It turned out she was the only girl in the group of 24 kids, and the youngest—two facts that stuck with Hosford. Researching further, he discovered that while there was a growing number of coding games hitting the market,

there weren't really any programs geared to very young kids.

"You could find pockets here and there, but there weren't any fun games," notes Hosford. "The handful of things that did exist tended to be in two buckets—what I would call 'move the robot,' which is not super interesting to most kids, and then the others that had a drill-and-kill feel." He also came across open-ended sandbox programs like Scratch, though while entertaining, need an adult on-hand to help kids to navigate the programming.

Hosford set his sights on creating a more kid-friendly offering. His mission eventually led him to Joe Shochet, known for his work in developing the first version of Alice3D (a 3D programming environment) and Disney's ToonTown Online. In March last year, the duo co-founded learning games company codeSpark.

Programming play Through their Pasadena-based startup, the entrepreneurs refined Hosford's prototype. They released a teaser version of their game for last year's Hour of Code event in December, where 40 million kids hit computer labs worldwide to learn about coding. Called *The Foos*, it teaches children the basics of coding—and infuses a welcome sense of fun into the process.

"My philosophy was to create a new version of move the robot, one that allowed kids to give cute characters commands, but was a more interesting mechanic than just finding your way through a maze," explains Hosford, now CEO of codeSpark. "I wanted to inject silliness into that process for the sake of engagement, and frankly for the sake of silliness."

Designed for kids ages five and up, *The Foos* is a self-directed coding game for iOS, Android, Kindle Fire and the web. Featuring levels of structured play and open areas for storytelling, the game takes place in the whimsical virtual world of Fooville, where kids can program a range of wacky characters known as the Foos. The structured levels introduce basic computer science concepts, while the open-play areas let kids hone their newly learned skills.

"Part of this is based on what we know to be successful for kids in the age group," explains Hosford. "If you look at things like *Dora the Explorer* that have had a powerful impact, both from an educational and entertainment standpoint, there's a thread there around character development... We believe very little education happens without engagement, so you have to really win the right to educate. That happens through being interesting."

Future work Already the game has attracted industry attention, being named a Code.org partner and a finalist in Lego's Re-Imagine Learning Challenge. Going forward, codeSpark plans to release the full version of the game this year, with a new area for video game creation and a spot where kids can design and share artwork. "The Foos is going to be this virtual world that grows quite a bit over time, but all within the one app," Hosford explains. "We'll be adding different themed areas that offer completely different takes on game play." —Daniela Fisher

The Digits

Numbers that speak volumes about kids and technology

You are what you watch?
56% of 13-year-olds agree

"I could be a YouTube star."

(Acumen Report: Constant Content, Defy Media)



41%

of US homes now have access to SVOD services, up from 36% a year ago (Nielsen)

Apple captured

89%

of Q4 smartphone profits, while Android took the remaining 11% (Strategy Analytics)



Fast-paced growth—the global percentage of video viewed on a mobile device grew from

1% to 38%

between 2011 and the end of 2014 (Global Video Index, Ooyala Research)



The vanguard—despite the cornucopia of content available to kids on YouTube, 75-year-old *Tom and Jerry* remains one of the site's most popular short-form offerings globally

A short-form revolution?

Production of bite-sized content has gone into overdrive, but unreliable monetization models are preventing a full-on takeover

BY GARY RUSAK

Animation first found a mass audience with the hand-drawn shorts that were showcased alongside newsreels and genre-film double features at movie houses around the world in the last century. And from the humble origins of Warner Bros.'s *Tom and Jerry* and *Merrie Melodies* a new art form emerged. So, with incessant technological advances that have made those movie screens portable and palm-sized—not to mention kids' current bottomless appetite for short-form content being fed by the likes of YouTube, Vine and kidcaster-owned apps—the format is more prevalent than ever before. However, there's still that tricky monetization hurdle no one's quite jumped over, which is arguably holding the short-form revolution back.

Whatever it is, it's everywhere

It isn't easy to define short-form content. One might think the definition is tied to a specific measure of time. However, content producers are hesitant to draw sharp lines.

"The sweet-spot is probably less than two minutes long," says Gary Binkow, founding partner and chief content officer at L.A.-based digital media company Collective Digital Studio (CDS). "But there are also Vines out there that are only six seconds long, so that is a big difference."

Peanuts is a brand that perhaps owing to its origins as a paneled comic strip, has recently found much success with various lengths of short-form content. In late 2013, Peanuts Worldwide inked a deal with France Télévisions to produce 500 90-second animated shorts. Also recently, the company partnered with Vine artist Khoa Phan to transform some of its assets specifically for the popular six-second video platform. In fact, Peanuts was among the first in the kids sphere to utilize the micro-content platform at all.

"Short-form is natural for us," explains Leigh Anne Brodsky, MD of Peanuts Worldwide. "It really is part of our legacy and heritage."

Beverly Hills, California-based Genius Brands International is launching traditional 26 x half-hour animated series *Thomas Edison's Secret Lab* on US public television this fall, but short-form is very much part of the overall strategy for the property. In advance of the series' launch, Genius is producing 52 x 90-second promotional music videos.

"We're going to get them on every digital platform we can," says Andrew Berman, SVP of global sales at Genius Brands International. "We have found that when you sell a series now, you have to deliver additional short-form content."

Currently, Nickelodeon is in the third season of its dedicated shorts program that initially started in the US and has since spawned an international program, as well. Nina Hahn, SVP of international production and development, says that shorts have been a high priority for the network for some time and it has had success with the shorts programs and its *Nick App* in gestating new content. Series such as *The Loud House* and *Welcome to the Wayne* both started as shorts and have graduated to become full long-form series that now air on Nick's more than 70 outlets around the world.

Hahn says that while Nick likes to give creators the freedom to decide how long a short is, she has found certain parameters work best for the format. "We try to get them to limit it to two or three characters," she says. "Usually it falls between two to four minutes—that seems like an ideal length, but it can stretch, too."

DreamWorksTV has also seized upon the trend. In just the past few years, the company has produced more than

1,000 shorts, utilizing characters from its robust library like Kung Fu Panda and also developing new IPs such as FiFi Cat Therapist and Life Hacks for Kids. Birk Rawlings, head of DreamWorksTV at AwesomenessTV, says that while there is not a specific target length, the majority of DreamWorks' shorts fall somewhere in the two- to five-minute range. He believes it is the ideal length to be able to package the content effectively for most digital platforms. "The bulk of what we are producing for digital is considered short form," he says. "We want to be wherever kids are, and that is where they are."

Even Disney has selected short form as the vehicle to bring the iconic Muppets back to TV. Kermit the Frog, Fozzie Bear, Animal and Miss Piggy are starring in brand-new Disney Junior series *Muppet Moments* that premieres on Disney Channel US at the beginning of the month. Featuring amusing and intimate moments between Muppets and kids as they discuss topics ranging from "apologies" to "favorite foods" and "manners," the first four x five-minute eps will be simultaneously made available on the WATCH Disney Junior app.

Who's got the time?

There appears to be a connection between the recent rise in the popularity of short-form content and the emergence of the highly scheduled lifestyle of the modern child. "There is a lot of time-fracturing with kids," says Beau Teague, senior director of user experience at Cartoon Network. "They maybe don't have time to invest in long-form content and will check out something on a smaller device



while waiting to pick up their sister at ballet, or after homework and before dinner."

Wynne Tyree, founder and president of Smarty Pants, a full-service youth and family research and strategy firm based in Jonesborough, Tennessee, agrees. Her firm's research bears out Teague's hypothesis and also concludes that YouTube has been the most successful digital platform in catering to kids' increasingly hectic schedules. "Kids are using YouTube to fill their every free moment," she says. "It's fast and easy and doesn't demand a lot of time that they don't have. If you want to know how pervasive it is, listen to kids. They don't say, 'Just Google it,' they say, 'Just YouTube it.'"

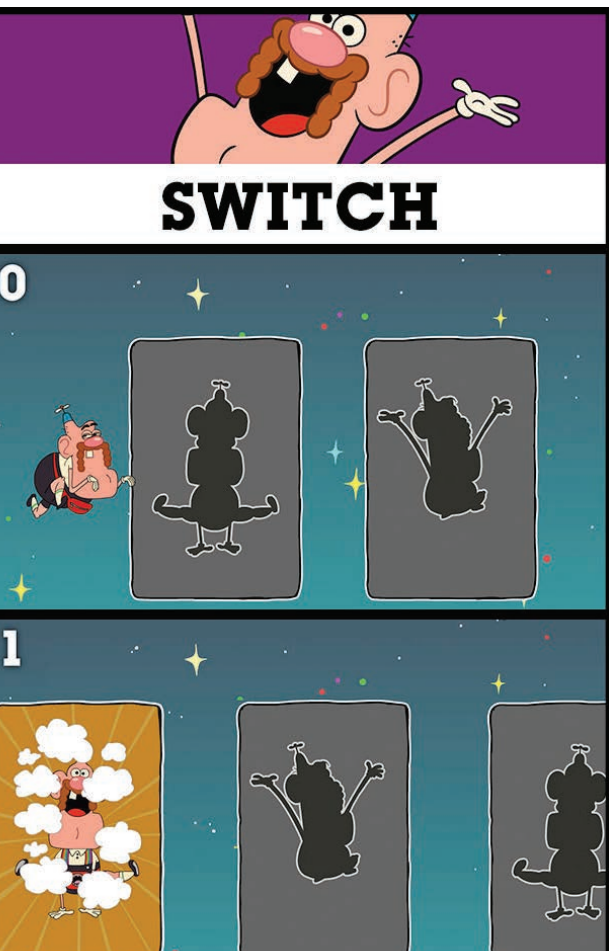
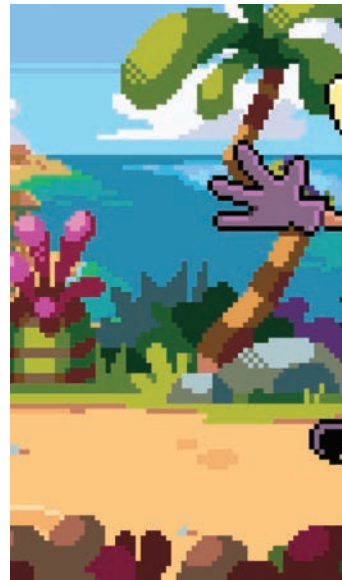
According to Smarty Pants' *Young Love: Clicks, Taps, and Swipes Report*, the firm's annual investigation into US kids' digital behavior, 66% of children with internet access visit YouTube daily. For core kids age six to eight, that number jumps up to 72%.

Tyree adds that YouTube's essentially limitless shelf-space is also a key driver. "Kids are really the original binge-watchers," she says. "They just have an insatiable appetite for content and stories."

A look at YouTube's own Watch Time statistics confirms Tyree's numbers. Watch Time tracks the amount of time users spend per session on the site. According to YouTube's own calculations, while adults increased their Watch Time by 50% in the last year, that number skyrockets up to 200% in the family entertainment category.

Platform power

Increasing YouTube's attractiveness as a platform is its ability to introduce new content to a large audience. Even Sesame Workshop, whose *Sesame Street* has flourished on traditional broadcast TV over the last 46 years, has a series that's available exclusively on YouTube outside of the UK. *The Furchester Hotel*, a co-production with British pubcaster CBeebies, debuted on the Workshop's YouTube channel in November 2014. New 11-minute episodes, featuring core characters Elmo and Cookie Monster, and their life at the hotel, are uploaded every Friday.



The 15-second format on app Cartoon Network *Anything* is driving kids back to CN in search of long-form episodes

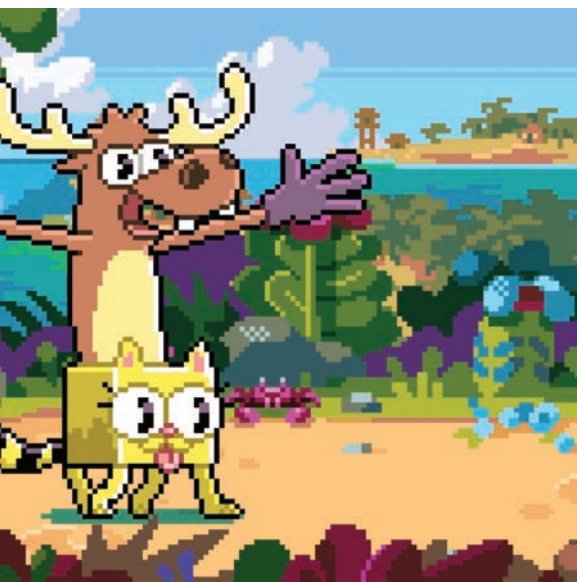


"It's an exciting platform," says Carol-Lynn Parente, Workshop SVP and executive producer for *Sesame Street*, noting that while the series isn't considered short form, it still speaks to the power of the YouTube platform. "For us, it's just another way to have kids reach out and touch *Sesame Street*. YouTube lends itself to a lot of different content opportunities."

When it came time for the kids entertainment veterans at Toronto, Canada-based Brain Power Studio and New York's Big Tent Entertainment to fully engage with short-form content, the pair decided to team up for a YouTube channel targeting the teen and young adult market. Built around a wholly original IP, dedicated live-action short-

parental controls. The result is a sealed and safe environ for kids and parents.

"It is the first app built by YouTube for families," says Malik Ducard, global head of family and learning. He adds that the app will initially rely on the long list of content deals the company already has in place with major kids producers like DreamWorks and The Jim Henson Company, but will eventually introduce new exclusive content. Deals are currently inked with Reading Rainbow host LeVar Burton for tech-focused series *uTech* and notable Minecraft posterboy Stampylonghead for a series called *Wonder Quest* being produced by Disney-owned Maker Studios.



The Muppets are returning to TV via short-form series *Muppet Moments* (top), while Nick continues to gestate new content like *Moosebox* (left) and *Monster Pack* (right) through its shorts program



form channel Something Fuzzy is like "Funny or Die for Pets." The channel launched last year, and Brain Power Studios has been seeding Something Fuzzy with content on a weekly basis ever since.

"We run it like a sketch-comedy show," says Brain Power founder Beth Stevenson, explaining that every Monday the editorial team gets together and pitches content that is then produced and uploaded to the channel by the end of the week. So far, there are about 60 30-second live-action segments available on the channel.

"It's a simple equation," she says. "On YouTube, you can carry out brand-building in a cost-effective way." And while the content itself can be stripped and pushed onto other popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, Stevenson says that from an eyeballs and revenue standpoint (more on that later) YouTube is still the go-to platform.

YouTube for kids

In February, YouTube released its new family-friendly kids app, developed for Android and iOS devices. The *YouTube Kids* app draws upon YouTube's famously sticky design, but adds kid-centric bells and whistles, including an easier-to-navigate swipeable interface and a number of

Ducard says the platform extension leaves the specifics of individual channel characteristics up to creators. "We aren't prescriptive," he says. "We provide open real estate for content partners to build their home in the way they want. We know they know their audiences better than we do."

CDS's Binkow says that YouTube's hands-off approach has helped to make its channels, like 4.2-million subscriber-strong, kid-centric Annoying Orange, so successful because it empowers both creators and their audiences. "It's our biggest platform," he says. "I think *YouTube Kids* is a great move on their part. It will help filter content and create more comfort for parents."

Of course, the YouTube Kids announcement didn't occur in a vacuum. It is only the biggest platform currently responding to kids' voracious demand for short-form content. Other digital outlets such as Twitter-owned Vine and Snapchat have also recently announced kid-friendly extensions.

"It makes sense," says Smarty Pants' Tyree. "Kids are just living in that short-form space right now."

Navigating the algorithm

We know kids crave snackable entertainment and they know exactly how and where to find it. The question for the

business becomes how can creators make sure that their productions don't get lost in this vast and ever-expanding digital universe? Of course, big media companies have a leg up in terms of marketing dollars and omni-channel presence, but there are other mechanisms that can help level the playing field for smaller teams. While securing a plum spot on a major network's broadcast schedule is often a function of luck, long-term relationships and the unexplained alchemy of the corporate world, achieving great placement in the digital sphere has more to do with math and performing due diligence.

Binkow, whose studio specializes in shepherding creators through digital deserts, says understanding analytics is a key factor in online success. "There are ways to maximize what you post," he says. "You have to consider how often you post, how you tag it, and what happens to it after it is posted."

He explains that because YouTube is essentially a large search engine, like Google, there are a number of different optimization strategies to be employed. "Tapping into the changes of the algorithm is part of the programming strategy," says Binkow. "You have to be able to strategically pivot around what you pick up from the analytics."

CDS has recently utilized its data-mining expertise to migrate popular Vine artists like Logan Paul (7.1 million Vine followers) and Rudy Mancuso (7.7 million Vine followers) onto the more lucrative YouTube platform.

However, arguably the company's biggest success is outside of the kids space. The CDS team has been working to improve the online imprint of *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*. The task was to effectively graft one of the oldest TV formats, the talk show, onto a YouTube channel to make it more relevant to a younger demographic. Well, mission accomplished—currently the channel boasts upwards of 6.5 million subscribers, far outnumbering its competition. Though Binkow believes that the lessons learned from *The Tonight Show's* digital success are easily applied to the kids space.

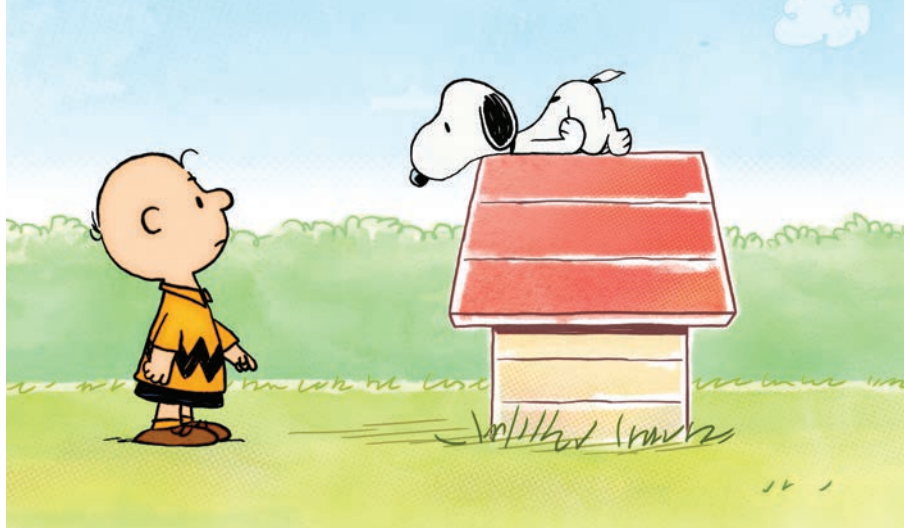
"We figured out what part of the overall content worked best in short form," he says. "In that case, it was the comedy bits, and not the interviews, that had the most traction. Then it's a matter of knowing when to post it and how best to link with different content on other platforms."

DreamWorksTV has also poured sizeable resources into analyzing the ebbs and flows of the kazillion ones and zeros that make up YouTube and other digital platforms. "You have to be able to take advantage of the mechanism behind it," says Rawlings.

Once media companies can master the techniques that maximize digital exposure, the bounty on the back-end is the deep and previously uncaptured information about its target audience.

"There is a lot of powerful data that media companies have access to on our platform," says YouTube's Ducard. "Our partners are able to carefully track their IP to see how it is performing and resonating on the platform. They can really see how well kids engage with it."

For instance, stats measuring the per-second view rate give creators a much more exact picture of their audience



In advance of the November release of *The Peanuts Movie*, the iconic characters will be featured in 500 animated 90-second shorts (top), and fun pet parodies are the focus of Brain Power's Something Fuzzy YouTube shorts channel (opposite)

than traditional Nielsen ratings. This has enabled creators to home in on specific characteristics of their output and tweak them according to the feedback. "You can see whether or not your content is holding people's attention, or if they just click away from it in 10 seconds," says Stevenson, who relies heavily on that particular data set to steer content on the Something Fuzzy channel. "It's really powerful stuff."

Money matters

Creating good content and expertly navigating the algorithm is all well and good, but the bills don't pay themselves. The survival of every business relies on figuring out just where the revenue is going to come from.

YouTube is a little ahead of other digital platforms in terms of presenting a viable revenue model for short-form content. Like its parent site, *YouTube Kids* also utilizes a limited ad model. There are pre-roll ads, both skippable and non-skippable, but *YouTube Kids* does not include any click-throughs to external websites. The app also only runs ads that are deemed family-friendly.

It may be limited, but the YouTube model does translate to cash for views, whereas other popular digital platforms like Vine, simply do not. "YouTube clearly has a leg up in terms of their revenue model," says Tyree. "It will be interesting to see what all of these other platforms do."

But the revenue generated by YouTube views can be overstated. "I don't think the revenue streams just from plays for original content is going to be sustainable," says Stevenson. "Perhaps if you have a library channel, it would be fine, but there is still a cost associated for us to produce content."

That is why Brain Power looks at the platform, and other digital environments, as primarily brand-building opportunities. Something Fuzzy's revenue model is simple—build the brand utilizing YouTube and other platforms, and then once traction is sufficiently established, move to monetize that popularity through deals in the consumer products and promotions areas. (See "Licensing in the short-form world," p. 63)

Bigger players also look at digital platforms as brand-building spaces that can help support monetization in more-or-less traditional ways through longer-form content plays and



consumer products. Peanuts, for example, will be using short-form content pushed onto every platform in a coordinated effort to promote its feature film *The Peanuts Movie* due in theaters around the globe this fall.

"Everyone is figuring out that balance right now" says Brodsky, explaining the increasingly blurred line between giving away content and brand promotion. "We do believe that great content has a value."

For major broadcasters with a large stable of different content, the strategy is a little different. Many of them,

including Nickelodeon and PBS KIDS, have developed their own free apps to distribute their growing inventory of short-form content. Last fall, Cartoon Network released its own short-form specific app, *Cartoon Network Anything*. At press time, the app, available on iOS and Android-enabled small screen devices, has been downloaded 1.5 million times across all platforms.

The micro-content (usually no more than 15 seconds) that it hosts is largely made up of little snippets of series from Cartoon Network's large library. "We found that when we go that short, it really reveals the essence of a show," says Cartoon Network's Teague.

Uncle Grandpa is one series that has worked particularly well in that format. Teague says the app has been successful in driving kids, who were otherwise unfamiliar with the series, back to the network to find full eps. And the network plans to start experiment with bowing original short-form content on the platform.

Because it is a wholly sealed environment, Cartoon Network is able to exert total control over its content. Besides helping the parent brand by promoting series found on its traditional broadcast arm, not to mention (in many cases) fully developed consumer products lines, the app also has its own revenue stream.

"We opened our native content experience to advertising partners," Teague says. "We work with them to create unique shorts and quizzes and content around their brand."


He says McDonald's, the app's launch partner, was happy with the initial program. Cartoon Network has already lined up a number of other sponsors to develop branded interactive and integrated experiences for the app in the future.

"It was phenomenal in terms of kids and their engagement with the ads," he says. "They were actually playing the ad. If you can create unique content with an advertising partner within the natural feel of the experience, it really goes a long way."

The more things change...

One interesting fact that Ducard discovered during the preparation for the *YouTube Kids* launch in February was the popularity of a particular piece of classic short-form entertainment.

"When we looked at the top Warner Bros.-owned content, our knee-jerk reaction was to expect that something like *The Dark Knight* might be the most popular," Ducard explains. "But globally, its most popular title is actually *Tom and Jerry*."

It is astounding when you think about it—in the midst of countless hours of shorts that have been produced since, those classic jewels of pure slapstick are still keeping kids' attention. Seventy-five years later, the only hope today's creators have of obtaining that same level of success is if they are able to navigate a digital terrain that is changing faster than a clever brown mouse can outsmart a hungry grey cat. 

Licensing in the short-form world

One way to monetize short-form content is to build an L&M campaign around it. However, there is some disagreement amongst executives on whether short form can create the necessary level of affinity required to support a robust CP campaign.

"Can you launch a CP line off a short?" asks Nickelodeon's Nina Hahn, "Probably not. We don't look at our shorts to do more heavy lifting than they have to."

Dominic Gardiner is a kids industry vet and the CEO of UK-based Jetpack Distribution. The company is currently distributing two short-form series, *Street Monsters* (20 x 2.5-minutes) for British prodco Everything Works and *Bawbles/Babioles* (23 x 2.5 minutes) for Samka Productions in France. He contends a sustainable CP program doesn't necessarily need a long narrative property to drive it. "With certain consumer products, I think character design has as much to do with it as anything," he says, citing Sanrio's Hello Kitty as a case in point. "If you have a character that is just instantly likeable because of its design, I don't think you need much more."

Another question that IP owners and potential licensing and retail partners must face is how to best integrate the universe of new metrics available into the licensing conversation. "I see [the new metrics] as part of the mix now," says Gardiner. "It is certainly meaningful because potential licensors are always interested in just how popular something is."

Andrew Berman of Genius Brands International says that retailers and licensors are becoming more and more familiar with the importance of digital metrics. "They are starting to get it for sure," he says. "In the end, it is really about getting those eyeballs — on whatever platform."

Head of DreamWorks TV Birk Rawlings agrees that the new metrics are now a part of the licensing and retail equations. "The industry at large is reacting to the change," he says. "The movement is taking time, but there is no question there is momentum." -Gary Rusak



Cool new shows!

BY LANA CASTLEMAN



preschool

Concept In this wholly re-imagined reboot of *Bob the Builder*, the famous construction worker has not only a new look, but also an entirely new environment. Familiar characters like best friend Wendy and construction vehicles Lofty, Muck and Scoop return, though. They've all been relocated to the bustling berg of Spring City, where Mayor Madison often calls on Bob's expertise to make civic improvements. HIT VP of global content Christopher Keenan says the new city provides a much more diverse landscape and a lot more opportunity for Bob to build. Additionally, there will be a greater incorporation of technology in Bob's world with the introduction of his young, tech-savvy apprentice, Leo. Keenan adds that the new series' design renders the characters (vehicular and human) more realistically and places Bob in his twenties, making the character more open to new experiences. (The previously middle-aged Bob was "more set in his ways.") Unchanged, however, is the show's famous rallying cry. "Can we build it?" HIT is sure it can.

Bob the Builder

Producer HIT Entertainment (A subsidiary of Mattel)

Style CGI animation

Format 104 x 11 minutes (series 1 & 2), 1 x 60-minute special, 43 x two-minute shorts

Budget US\$18.3 million

Status In production and set for 2015 broadcast on Channel's 5's Milkshake! block in the UK, PBS KIDS in the US, and Super RTL in Germany in 2015; and Televisa in Mexico in 2016.

Delivery Fall 2015

My American Friend

Co-producers

Rainbow and RAI (both Italy)

Style Live action

Format 26 x 26 minutes

Budget Roughly US\$4.9 million

Status Principal photography is scheduled to start in May and scripting has already started on a second season. Rainbow will be on the hunt for international sales at MIPCOM in October.

Delivery Q1 2016



tween girls

Concept Well-established as one of Europe's largest animation houses, Loreto, Italy's Rainbow is jumping into live action with both feet after first dipping its toes in the water with live-action/animated *Mia and Me* in 2011. For the Italian/German/Canadian co-pro, Rainbow actually oversaw the live-action segments and was so pleased with their international reception that it set to work on a full live-action project. The result, tween-targeted *My American Friend*, also taps into the worlds of music and fashion—something Rainbow knows about, thanks to producing seven seasons of hit animated series *Winx Club*. At the heart of the series is the friendship that develops between US scholarship student Jessie and well-off Italian girl Bianca, as they study at the prestigious Academy of Fashion in Milan. Jessie dreams of becoming a successful fashion designer, while Bianca enters the academy only at the behest of her controlling father. Her real dream? To form a rock band. The action unfolds as the girls help each other to navigate their new world.

girls
4 to 6

Magiki

Co-producers

Zodiak Kids (Tele Images, France), Animasia (Malaysia)

Style

2D Flash

Format

52 x 11 minutes

Budget

US\$6 million

Status

In pre-production, revisiting bible and ready to start scripting with the aim of going into full production by mid-summer.

Delivery

Summer 2016



Concept Zodiak Kids in France dipped into its sister company DeAgostini Publishing's IP vault and found the Magiki European partworks program. According to chief creative officer Eryk Casemiro, Magiki's strong publishing program revolves around a collectible figurine line and does not have "a lot of story." So his team is building out a world for the series inspired by the DEA property, in which its heroine unlocks a magic kingdom with a key. She discovers a whimsical, comedic place where she is a princess. Of course it's not all sunshine and roses, and Princess Billie finds herself pitted against the evil Antoinette, who repeatedly tries to trick her and her fellow Magiki. Billie readily admits she doesn't have all the answers, but makes the effort to lead her friends out of scrapes, despite her shortcomings.

Concept Created and developed by the team at leading Jamaican studio Alcyone Animation, the series follows a "sly" mongoose named Magnus and his friend Patch. The pair takes children on a Caribbean adventure, full of culture and discovery. "The Caribbean is a melting pot of many cultures owing to its rich and vibrant history," notes the studio's CEO Alison Latchman. "Magnus gives great insight into this wondrous world while teaching children healthy social relations and responsibility, using the Caribbean language, music and folklore." Additionally, a book series featuring Magnus and Co. is currently available on Amazon and in bookstores throughout Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. Revenue generated from book sales will go towards the continued production of the animated series, and the books are also being translated into Spanish for a Latin American market release in May. Alcyone has also developed a game inspired by the series, which will be available on mobile devices next month.

kids
3 to 6

Magnus the Mongoose

Producer

Alcyone Animation (Jamaica)

Style

2D animation

Format

26 x 11 minutes

Budget

US\$1.5 million

Status

Introduced to the market at Kidscreen Summit in February, a bible and trailer are complete, and scripting and design are underway. It's been pre-sold to a number of Caribbean broadcasters, including TVJ (Jamaica), ZBM9 (Bermuda) and NCN (Guyana).

Delivery

Summer 2017



kids
5 to 7

Blinky

Producer

Studio 100 Media (Belgium)

Style

CGI animation

Format

52 x 11 minutes

Budget

Between US\$6 million and US\$7 million

Status

In development

Delivery

Q4 2016

Concept Based on the classic Australian children's book series The Complete Adventures of Blinky Bill, and its various TV iterations that aired until the mid-1990s, this new TV series will continue to tell the story of Blinky and his friends, drawing upon a rich tradition of Australian storytelling and iconography. We find Blinky taking up the mantle of "guardian of the greenpatch." Guided by his adventurer's handbook, the cheeky kid koala bear and his loyal side kick Jacko swear to protect their hometown from danger, real or (mostly) imagined. Studio 100-owned Flying Bark Productions is also currently in the late production stages of CGI feature film, *Blinky Bill The Movie*, launching in Q4. **k**



If you let a six-year-old **loop a burp noise**, they **learn** what a loop is **really quickly**. **I have teenager brain**. If you think you're Mr. Rogers and you **want to start your own neighborhood** you can—you could never do that before. **I'm really into this**, though other people will be **confused by it**.

- Tips for teaching kids how to code from app developer codeSpark's CEO **Grant Hosford**
- *Star vs. The Forces of Evil* creator **Daron Nefcy** on why she enjoys writing about kids going through transitional periods in life
- Children's Technology Review Editor **Warren Buckleitner** posits the potential of the new *YouTube Kids* app
- Cartoon Network's **Curtis Lelash** discusses the challenge of defending unusual projects like *Adventure Time* and *Uncle Grandpa*

Wissper

52 x 7' CGI ANIMATION

COMEDY/ADVENTURE FOR GIRLS, 4-7 YEARS

CURRENTLY IN PRODUCTION:
FIRST 26 EPISODES AVAILABLE END OF 2015

CO-PRODUCTION AND PUBLISHING PARTNER:



MASTER TOY PARTNER:

SIMBA · DICKIE · GROUP

CREATED BY
DAN GOOD
"WAYBULOO"

SEASON 2
NOW AVAILABLE
SEASON 3
IN PRODUCTION



© 2015 Hahn & m4e Productions, Rainbow



© 2015 m4e AG, Absolutely Cuckoo

52 x 23' (2 x 26 EPISODES)

SEASON 3 IN PRODUCTION
- AVAILABLE FALL 2016

SEASON 1 SOLD TO +80 TERRITORIES

HUGE LICENSING SUCCESS

INTERNATIONAL TOY PARTNER: **MATTEL**

**Mia
and me**
Created by Gerhard Hahn



SUCCESSFUL
TV LAUNCHES
IN GERMANY,
ITALY & FRANCE

52 x 7' PRESCHOOL CGI ANIMATION

BASED ON THE BEST-SELLING
CHILDREN'S BOOK SERIES

11 MILLION COPIES SOLD WORLDWIDE

TRANSLATED INTO 32 LANGUAGES

KEY BROADCASTERS:



**TIP the
MOUSE**

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